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CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER THROUGH THE BIBLE

EXPOSITORY AND DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTS

BY

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IN FOUR VOLUMES

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There was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

WITH such care was the material prepared and fashioned that its assembly was entirely without confusion. From quarry and forest and mine, the stone and wood and gems were brought ready for their final place in the temple of the Lord. And yet much work of chisel and axe and hammer had gone to effect this state of perfection. Sharp edge and heavy blow had done their work before each item was made meet for the Master's use. But all this work of preparation was hidden.

In this is a picture of the silent growth by which "the whole Building, fitly joined together, groweth unto an Holy Temple" for God's eternal indwelling. Each stone in that invisible building is itself a temple in miniature, prepared by the indwelling Holy Spirit to occupy a place in the whole. This is the meaning of life's hidden discipline, by which faults are corrected, blemishes removed, capacities enlarged, and needed spiritual qualities imparted. It is all in view of the place which each must occupy in the spiritual House of God. There is nothing of ostentation or noise in this process. The inner constraint of the Spirit answers in each to the outer providential arrangement of circumstances, and the living stones find themselves in position. Nothing happens by chance. The Master Builder knows just what He is doing with each one, and in the silence His plans are perfected as we are acquiescent. The compulsion of axe and hammer is not needed in the life that is truly yielded to Him.

And the chapiters that were upon the top of the pillars were of lily work.

SINCE every detail of the Temple-building had a significant meaning, each being designed to show forth something of the beauty of holiness, no part of this record is without spiritual value. The fact that the pillars which supported the roof were adorned with chapiters of tracery is suggestive of that combination of strength and beauty which is seen in the perfect character of God, and which forms part of the ideal life also of His people. That infinite pains should be taken, not only to assure the stability of God's house, but also its chaste decoration, is truly characteristic of Him Who has not, in the world of nature, made anything strong which is not also beautiful, and Whose care in nature and grace alike is not only for the great, but also for the small details of life.

Christ has promised to those who overcome that they shall be made pillars in the House of the Lord. The true life is to be a support to others, fulfilling His Law in the service of burden-bearing. At the fulfilment of this His purpose every true believer aims. How many, however, are content with the cultivation of the stronger qualities, while entirely negligent of those which make for beauty. It is not enough that a Christian should be strong and upright as a pillar. If his witness to the Lord is to be attractive the pillar must be surmounted by chapter of lily work. With scrupulous care the graces of the Spirit must be cultivated. The Lord must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness, or the world will never be attracted by our testimony.

A settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

THE solemn dedication of the Temple marked the close of Solomon's godly enterprise, and the commencement of a new era of religious worship, and consequent prosperity to the land. Hitherto, the people have known God in a general sense, as dwelling in cloud and fire and the glory-light above the mercy-seat. Now He comes nearer to them in a permanent dwelling-place in their midst. From that time onward the Temple became the centre of the entire national life. God was henceforth in the midst of His people, and thus their security was established. And it was sublime faith on the part of the king and people, which declared that His presence would not be withdrawn from them, that He should inhabit this House for ever. It expressed their reliance upon the unchanging character of His love, and the abiding nature of His purpose toward them. Whatever cause of fear they might have in the days to come, they could never be in any dread that He would leave them.

Upon the conception of God which either nations or individuals have, depends their moral and spiritual state. To apprehend aright the unchangeableness of His mercy invests life with both seriousness and confidence. And it is such conception which Christ creates in His promise, "If a man love Me he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." But this simple and unencumbered condition of so knowing God must always be carefully observed. His abiding presence in the yielded temple of the heart is dependent upon obedience. Israel learned this lesson in later days; and life's experience emphasizes it likewise to us all.

Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually.

THUS did God graciously respond to the solemn act of dedication by which the Temple was made over to Him for His indwelling, and set apart for the worship of His people. He covenants to maintain watchfulness and care in regard to it. His eyes will take note of every sincere sacrifice offered there, and from His heart will ever flow fresh streams of love and blessing to all who serve Him thus in spirit and in truth. This promise at once prevents all careless unreality in the people's approach to Him, and assures to them the continuance of His blessing, upon which the prosperity of the land entirely depends. "Thou God seest me" is the safeguard of His people against all that is merely conventional in their religious life. And the fact that He cares also, is a positive inspiration to make life, in all its details, well-pleasing to Him.

To draw near to the presence of God in worship, whatever be the earthly form of the Temple—and in this dispensation, be it understood, that there is no specifically localized presence of God—is to come under the scrutiny of eyes that are as a flame of fire. We may, and often do, hide from ourselves things unworthy and unreal, but all these are naked and open before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. We may deceive ourselves, but He is never mocked. He searches us for our sanctification; and if we betake ourselves to the open Fountain under constraint of the conviction which His gaze produces, we find that His heart is indeed toward them whom His eyes search.

Behold, the half was not told me.

THE Queen of Sheba came on her pilgrimage to Solomon with large expectations. The fame of his wisdom and glory had reached her in her own land, and it was a true instinct which led her to Jerusalem to verify for herself the things she had heard. She returned with a story which exceeded all that had ever been told her concerning the king, upon whom the favour and blessing of God so manifestly rested. From henceforth the things she had seen filled her vision. The transcendence of every glory with which she was commonly familiar evoked undying wonderment. Her experience of thus having come into touch with God through His servant, changed her every sense of value, and inferentially altered her entire outlook and conception of life.

Christ Himself uses this incident to condemn those who came into contact with Him, but who were blinded to the facts of His glory and power, though all so lavishly displayed. Solomon's excellence was but a dim foreshadowing of all that was incarnate in Him. "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" were brought nigh to men when He became Man. "The brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person" were disclosed to view in Him. He was the wisdom and power of God personified. And yet men saw Him unmoved, and departed from His presence unsubdued. Truly the Queen of Sheba condemns all such in that day—and this. "For a Greater than Solomon is here," wherever Christ is revealed.

Solomon . . . went not fully after the Lord.

THIS is the tragedy of a life which was more richly endowed than any that had gone before. Solomon kept to the path of humility and obedience for so long, that his failure to maintain fellowship with God is all the more striking. It cannot be that his defection was a sudden matter. Indeed, there is no hint of this. Gradually his heart was drawn away from its supreme purpose by the love of strange women. He succumbed little by little, as many another has done, to their flattery and fawning ; and in his fall he involved the whole nation. All Israel's subsequent trouble and ultimate disintegration is traceable to his departure from the ways of the Lord. He who had risen so high in Divine favour, and had lifted his people to higher moral levels than they had ever known, fell to depths of idolatry and licentiousness which, in earlier days, had been furthestmost from his thoughts. And he took Israel with him.

No man, however highly gifted, is immune from temptation. A man may be greatly used in the public service of God, whose heart may yet fall from its sincere consecration. For the peril of all such is that of becoming careless regarding their inner lives. Few men become backsliders by a sudden turning away from God. A course of secret heart-alienation in all cases precedes the outward perversity by which a man's downfall is declared. It is, therefore, at the hidden springs of action that we need to exercise watchfulness, lest we become guilty also of the blood of others.

And this thing became a sin.

THE setting up of the two calves of gold in Bethel and Dan was Jeroboam's earliest declaration that he renounced the claims and service of God. In direct defiance of His commandment, and with utmost contempt of His dwelling-place in Jerusalem, he erected these altars and idols, so that under guise of the worship of God the people might be prevented from coming under the influences which centred in the Temple, and which would have made against his own cause. It was a convenient religion which he provided, for it obviated the long periodical journeys to Jerusalem which were enjoined upon the nation. Not unnaturally, the people fell under this snare, and the golden calves at Bethel and Dan became, like that earlier one in the wilderness, centres of impious orgies in the name of religion. So steep is the road which begins in convenient disregard of God's plain ordinances.

All this is powerful illustration of the beginnings of evil, not in proud renunciation of religious obligation, but in its adulteration. The people imagined that they could both worship God and serve their own convenience at Jeroboam's altars; hence they acquiesced in his specious plans. From disobedience to idolatry is no far step. Conscience soon becomes drugged when comfort and well-being is apparently secured. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" from its own false, sinful ways. But every man-made way of worship, however specious, is of utterly opposite influence. Anything akin to Jeroboam's ordinance must be strenuously resisted by all who would save themselves from sin and shame.

Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth [voice] of the Lord.

THE story of the man of God, who, after courageously standing before the king to declare his doom, and after resisting also the offers of his favour, fell before the wiles of another prophet, who seduced him from the way of obedience, is full of meaning. Direction had been given to him by the Lord Himself; and while he kept within His instructions he was protected by His power. Hence the scene at the altar, and God's vindication of His servant. It is clear that he should have known God's ways sufficiently well at once to repel any suggestion of His changeableness, from whatever quarter it came. But here he fell. Without commenting on the old prophet's moral perversity—himself in all likelihood a backsliding servant of the Lord—it is enough to note the perilous folly of hearkening to men rather than to God. The Nemesis of such disobedience is seen in the fact that the same voice which tempted from the path of duty declared also the consequence of betrayed trust.

We are in like danger whenever we lose the spirit of single-eyed fidelity to what we know of God's Will. When honoured by His commission to speak His Word, or to undertake His work in any way, "this one thing, I do" must be the language of our hearts. Retribution may not follow upon our unfaithfulness in the same swift and dramatic fashion as here, but it is always certain. Christ's command to His servants is—"See that ye salute no man by the way." And it is their highest wisdom to carry out His direction with scrupulous care. Every deviation is charged with the potency of destruction.

We shall give Israel up.

THE words of Ahijah to the wife of Jeroboam were such as could not fail to bring home to him the enormity of his sin. Not only was his son to die, but he himself was to be cut off with all his house. Moreover, the people who, at his instigation, had turned from God to the worship of idols were to lose the presence and favour of God, and to be left to reap the harvest of their sin. A blacker picture of the destructiveness of evil, brought into the land and fostered by one man, it is difficult to find. It is a declaration of the unrelieved gloom and ruin which follows upon the rejection of God's Word and Will.

This sentence upon Israel is only matched by the New Testament record of those "who did not like to retain God in their knowledge," and who, casting themselves loose from all the fancied trammels of His law, went to such unspeakable depths of sinful degradation that "God gave them up." It does not mean an absolute reprobation by the Lord, as though for all such there was no possible hope of recovery. Rather does it declare that God did not, and in like cases does not, intervene to save them from the consequences of their own misdoing. It is only by reaping the whirlwind that some men can ever be brought to know the sin of sowing the wind. By unspeakable suffering alone can the sinfulness of sin be brought home to wilful hearts. Yet God's forgiving mercy is endless; and none need regard himself as in danger of being given up, who has any thought of penitence and contrition for his wrong-doing.

But the high places were not removed.

KING ASA went to certain lengths in following the footsteps of David, who had set the standard to all his successors upon the throne in regard to obeying the Word of the Lord. He cleansed the land from the most outrageous of its sins, and he even deposed his own mother from queenly rank because of her idolatries. That his heart was sincere in its intention of full obedience is thus certainly evidenced ; and yet he failed to effect a permanent reform among the people. He stopped short of the destruction of the high altars which had been erected up and down the land for the worship of false gods. Thus when the moral impulse of his early reign had spent itself, everything was at hand for the widespread return to idolatry. In this Asa is an illustration of how far one may go in a right direction, and yet stop short of fullest effectiveness.

In individual life it is no uncommon thing for men who have heard the voice of God, and who desire to walk in His ways, to deal drastically with the obvious things which contradict this purpose, and yet to fail to go far enough. The actual causes of temptation are not ruthlessly destroyed and trampled upon. The avenues of evil influence are not broken down and closed up. Consequently, it is only a matter of time until the enemy asserts himself by these means. Temptation which was thought to be long dead arises again in strong force to defy and defile. Nothing but the most thorough-going and radical dealing with old causes of sin is of avail in the life to which we are pledged.

The way of Jeroboam . . . to make Israel to sin.

IN these terms Jeroboam is consistently referred to in the history of Israel. He has come to be designated as the one who was the cause of Israel's sin, and, hence, of all its subsequent suffering and disorder. The unenviable notoriety of an abiding influence for evil for ever attaches to him, and in these few words the whole of his history is, in fact, written. He did many things in his life, but this one stands out as his undying record—*he made Israel to sin*. God held him responsible for the influence he wielded, and punished him accordingly; but the effect of that influence lived on long after him, as is witnessed by the chequered history of the people whom he led astray.

The strongest fact in any life is that of its unwitting influence over others. Consciously, or unconsciously, we are always starting or strengthening springs of moral activity in the lives of those with whom we come into contact. Even the most casual connections of life are of importance on this account. And since influence in its ultimate analysis depends entirely upon personal character, nothing is more important for any man than honest and resolute dealing with himself in this respect. For if our faith is not expressing itself in worthy living, we are adversely affecting the destinies of those we touch. We may never be aware of the blight we are bringing upon the life of another. Infection works noiselessly and without warning. But, like Jeroboam, our sorest condemnation in the Great Day will be, that we have made it easy for others to depart from the Lord by our laxity and unfaithfulness.

And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up.

IT was part of the preparation of the prophet for his life-work that he should be taught to rely upon God alone, and to recognize also the various methods by which God fulfils Himself toward His people. After having been miraculously supported at the brook Cherith, while the land was in the throes of famine, Elijah is compelled to witness the drying-up of the stream at which he daily quenched his thirst. Doubtless he was greatly perplexed that God should so withdraw His former mercies ; yet his faith did not fail. He clung to the fact of God's faithfulness, even when external evidences seemed to contradict it. And, in consequence, the dried-up river-bed became to him a place of blessing, and marked an epoch in his development as a man of God and a prophet. For there he heard the Word of the Lord bidding him journey to Zarephath, where he was to learn yet deeper lessons, and catch a still wider vision of the ways of God. In reviewing his life this experience at Cherith is seen to be one of the crises by which he was led forward to the crowning triumph of Mount Carmel.

God still withdraws His former mercies in order to lead His people on to greater things. For the fact is, He can often say things, and we can best understand them, when outward prosperity is at its lowest ebb. When those streams which once nourished life dry up—the streams of human love, of material wealth—then we learn that God has some better thing for us. If, like Elijah, we press on from faith to faith, we shall find ourselves moving also from grace to grace, from strength to strength, and from glory to glory.

The God that answereth by fire, let Him be God.

THE prophet's challenge to the false ministers of Baal, and God's vindication of His own nature and of His servant's faith, is one of the most dramatic records we possess. Confronted by overwhelming odds in the royal patronage of the false god, the strength of popular support, and the intense hatred of the heathen prophets, who realized their peril when confronted with the LORD God, Elijah stood boldly in this hour of testing. He could, without any anxiety, fling out this challenge because he had come to know God in his own experience. It was no new thing for him that God should answer by fire, for in his desert training the holy fire from off the Altar had burned into his soul, purifying his heart, and inspiring his lips. He had learned to live under a friendly Heaven, and hence it was without a tremor of uncertainty that he stood before a hostile nation. The one man who was entirely unsurprised when the fire from God consumed the sacrifice, was the prophet.

It is in the secret places of life that we are trained and fitted for public ministry. One feeble man, whose life is truly yielded to God, and who is recklessly courageous in the carrying out of His bidding, may turn an entire nation Godward. When he speaks, God will speak through him ; and when he pledges God in the terms of his own experience, He will always verify his evangel. There is a baptism of fire which alone endues His servants for their Carmel. If we but seek and tarry for it, nothing shall be impossible in the carrying out of His purposes.

I KINGS xix. II.

Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.

ELIJAH'S reaction after the great experience of Mount Carmel is not difficult to understand. The ebb of courage following upon an effort which had made heavy demands upon heart and mind, is an experience common to all, in whatever realm their high hour has been lived. When depression in this way succeeds exaltation, the evil one is never far away. For he finds fertile ground in every downcast heart for the sowing of the noxious seed of doubt. Had Elijah yielded to his own depressed mood, his usefulness for God had been at an end. But just when his power of resistance was weakened, the angel visitor appeared, recalling him to his true allegiance. It is good to know that not only is the adversary aware of our hours of weakness and danger, but that the Lord Himself takes note, and is swift to succour His needy servant.

A rebuke is often a disguised blessing. Elijah needed this form of address in order to arouse him to an understanding of his causeless fear. Such an one as he is, has no right to be fitful and repining. If he will "go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord," instead of hiding himself away in a cave, he will find new inspiration in a new vision of His power. And so it ever is. When we are living on earth's low levels, we fail to catch the inspiring visions of God which are the true support of the prophetic life. We must come out into the sunshine and make the ascent of the mountain, if we would discern those evidences of God's power which are always available for the re-creation of faith and courage.

Their gods are gods of the hills.

THE Syrian enemies of Israel made the mistake of imagining that the power of Israel's God was limited and local. Accustomed as they themselves were to erect their own altars on hill-tops, and aware also that but recently many altars of Baal had similarly been erected in Israel, they concluded that it would be unsafe to make their renewed attack in the mountainous districts. They thought that if they could but take Israel unawares on the low ground, then success might attend them because of the remoteness of the protecting deities. Their mistake was in imagining that God, Whose people the Israelites were, was as one of their own idols. Had they at all realized His supremacy, they would have been saved from this false reasoning which resulted in disaster.

There is a great danger of falling into the Syrians' error in regard to localizing the authority of God in personal life. We are ready enough to give Him lordship of the hills—the great things of life. Our Sabbaths, for instance, are as mountain peaks on which He is worshipped, but on the plains of ordinary duty how often we fail to recognize Him! And there is the place of our defeat. To exclude Him from any part of life's area, and to plan without any deference to His oversight and control, is to make moral calamity ultimately certain. He is not Lord at all if He is not Lord of all. It is really in the valleys of life, and most of all in the last valley of the shadow of death, that He makes himself a reality to the surrendered believer.

Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days.

EVEN such an one as Ahab, whose story of weakness and misrule is one of the darkest blots on Israel's history, may be subdued under the Word of the Lord, and brought to repentance. Indeed, there is hardly a more striking instance of a bad man being humbled and brought to a frame of mind and state of heart, whose sincerity is attested by God Himself. For that it was not a mere pose on his part is assured by the fact that God accepted him, and turned away the evil of his deserts. How wonderfully is His mercy magnified in thus dealing graciously with one so verily guilty ! And still God always acts in a way worthy of Himself.

There are dark hours in every life when the consciousness of sin becomes overwhelming. By the proclamation of the enlightening Word, by the Divinely-arranged order of circumstances, and by the promptings of a disquieted conscience, the fact of guilt is brought home to the soul. The fears of such an hour are unutterable, for the righteousness of sin's punishment is incontestable. With what joy does the Evangel fall upon our ears in the darkness, declaring God's goodwill toward us, and proclaiming the certainty of His pardon to the repentant and humbled heart ! And what encouragement is to be found in the fact that men so deeply stained as Ahab found mercy and grace along this same pathway. We need not despair, since God is the unchanged and unchanging One. Nor are the terms of His covenant altered.

As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.

MICAHIAH the son of Imlah stands out conspicuously as a man who could not be influenced either by royal threats or patronage. The king of Israel, whose mind was already made up as to the course he intended to pursue, had sufficient respect for him as a prophet of the Lord to desire his endorsement of his scheme. He had found no difficulty in getting other prophets to declare what he desired. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, with whom he was in alliance, was, however, of truer discernment, and demanded a word from the Lord through one who was acknowledged to be His messenger, ere he committed himself to a war with such far-reaching consequences as the one projected must inevitably have. Then it was that the king of Israel turned to Micaiah, knowing him to be a true servant of God. Micaiah, however, was proof against his blandishments, and did not fear to declare the whole counsel of God.

It is the prophet who is delivered from all fear of man by his vision of God, whose message is confirmed "with signs following." He realizes himself to be but the Lord's mouthpiece. His word is not an original creation, but a transmitted message. His ear is open at all times to catch the Divine voice; and assured of this he has no hesitancy in opening his lips to declare it. Such an one cannot fail to be used of the Lord. His "thus saith the Lord" commands the attention of men, and his fearless courage is a ready channel for the Spirit's power. How much are such-like men needed to-day, when all the world seems to go after the prophets who prophesy smooth things!

2 KINGS i. 3.

Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal=zebub ?

THUS does Elijah confront the messengers of king Ahaziah. His action in sending them to inquire at Ekron of the prophets of Baal as to the chances of his recovery, evidences his defection from the worship of the true God. In a crisis of need, men act openly as they have long acted secretly. Involuntarily they declare themselves and disclose, either their secret faith, or their unbelief. Ahaziah seeks assurance from the false god only because he has lost his faith in the True. Elijah's stinging rebuke was not merely the expression of his own indignation, but the direct Word of God committed to him by the angel-messenger. Thus supported, he is not afraid to face the wrath of the king. Where other men would flatter him to secure his favour, he has no object to serve beyond the honour of God.

This challenge to the king is one that may well be advanced in our own day to those who forsake God, seeking help in the vagaries of false systems, and looking for comfort in the empty promises of the many voices which claim the suffrages of men's faith. For there are many who still hew to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water, as though God were untrustworthy, and could not satisfy the needs of His children. Christ's challenge to all such is : " Will ye also go away ? " And every one who has ever had the bitter experience of disillusion which the course of Ahaziah brings, responds : " To whom shall we go, Lord ? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life."

The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.

THE dramatic story of the journey of the departing prophet, and his chosen successor, is one of arresting force. Unheeding the kindly dissuasions of the older man, only expressed in order to test the steadfastness of his determination, the younger persists in his purpose of accompanying him to the end. Each step of the journey is marked by its own significance. Bethel, Jericho, and Jordan are more than geographical points in their progress. They mark stages of deepened experience on the part of each. The undaunted faith and courageous ongoing of Elisha were rewarded by an experience of miracle and vision, which for ever assured him of the Divine call, and gave indubitable promise of his future service. Imperceptibly to himself the spirit of Elijah rested upon him, enduing him with qualities of faith and power which were their own attestation to all beholders.

All this is not merely history, but allegory also. It is prophetic of the fellowship of the disciples of the Lord. Those who follow Him with full purpose of heart through every self-diffidence and world-dissuasion, intent upon one thing only, have the same experience. Calvary leads on to Pentecost and the Upper Room. There His Spirit rests upon them, and by His indwelling power they become inevitably identified in character and service with their Master. Men are not slow to recognize the distinguishing marks of the Lord Jesus in those whose life-passion has become the carrying-on of that work to which He pledged Himself in life and death. And in their turn they become themselves leaders of other men in the Way of Life.

There was great indignation against Israel.

THERE are some victories which are more costly than defeats. Israel's success over Moab at this time was of this nature. For though they achieved a triumph, their methods were obviously of a sort upon which the Divine blessing could not rest. Hence, while they put Moab to flight, they lost favour with God, and with their allies Edom and Judah also. Whether this was on account of Mesha's sacrifice of his son, to which he had been driven by some inhumanity upon Israel's part, is obscure. The fact remains, however, that for some reason or other Israel's success was a barren one. And, indeed, any seeming advantage is empty and worthless which adversely affects relationship with God and man, whether those involved be nations or persons.

The displeasure and indignation of others is not always to be regarded as undesirable. There are situations in life in which fidelity to God and to truth inevitably bring men into collision with those who are opposed to His cause. Such indignation has to be both accepted and welcomed as evidencing faithfulness. On the other hand, there is a righteous indignation which expresses itself when the moral sense is outraged by inconsistent actions on the part of those who are professedly God's children, which is an expression of the Divine displeasure. For God does not "hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." To profess His knowledge, and then to deny Him by unholy deeds, is to incur indignation, which more often than not is voiced through human lips.

What hast thou in the house?

THIS woman, impoverished and embarrassed, fearing the loss of her sons on account of her debt, had yet within her reach that which, in the multiplying hand of God, would suffice to pay all she owed. Yet all the time she was unaware of all her resources, and needed the intervention of the prophet to bring them to light. The pot of oil—her one remaining possession—proved sufficient to provide all that was necessary for paying off her creditors and re-establishing her in an honourable position. Indeed, so abundant was the supply that it only stayed when every available vessel was filled. As was her need, so was the Divinely-manifested supply, “exceeding abundant” above all she asked or thought. Such an intimation of the Divine character as this incident affords, anticipates the greater fulness of life and blessing provided in Christ.

In times of difficulty, and when resources seem to be strained to the utmost, we are all apt to forget that since we have Christ we need never be impoverished. He Who has come to abide in our hearts is Himself the fountain of all grace, and no need is ever so great or acute but that He can wonderfully meet it, if we but call upon Him, and yield ourselves to His direction. When foes threaten and obligations seem to be overwhelming, it is well that we should ask our souls—“What hast thou in the house?” And since the answer to that query is “*Christ*,” we may well bid our fears be gone. For in all things we are enriched by Him.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?

THUS Naaman reasoned with himself when the message of the prophet had struck a blow at his pride. For while he had come to be healed of his leprosy, he really desired to be humoured, and it was an offence to him that the prophet did not seem to realize that he had to do with a great man. The futility of his comparison of the water of Jordan with the rivers of his own land is apparent, when we remember that again and again he had bathed in them without experiencing anything of healing. Had this not been so, there would have been no need for his journey to Israel in search of cure. Yet, like many another, he had to be convinced of the folly of his thoughts, and of the urgency of the situation also, before he availed himself of the priceless blessing which the prophet declared to him by the Word of the Lord.

Abana and Pharpar may well stand for the self-resources of men, their powers of self-effort in the direction of repressing inward evil, and of cultivating latent good. That these are among God's moral gifts no one denies. Like the greatest stream of all—God's Grace in Jesus Christ—they certainly take their rise in the hills of His power; and there is much to be said in praise of their value in any life. But the supreme test of their place and worth in the life of Naaman and ourselves is: Can they cure leprosy? Have they inherent virtue to cleanse the defilement of sin, and to impart the new fresh life of a little child to debilitated souls? This is the condemnation of all self-effort as a means of salvation.

The Lord opened the eyes of the young man.

THE young servant of the prophet at Dothan might well be alarmed, for it would almost seem as though their case was hopeless. The Syrian hosts encircled the city, and made all attempt at escape impossible. Elisha had seriously interfered with the plans of the king, and had aroused his angry determination to capture him. Knowing this, the young man's fear is not unnatural. As for the prophet, he is quite unmoved, for he well knew that the defences of God were around him. It was no merely speculative prayer which asked that God would give the young man to see what he already realized. This granted, his fears vanished. For what were Syrian cavalry in comparison with the hosts of heaven !

There runs like a refrain through Old and New Testament an injunction to the people of God to "fear not." Their perils, and the forces arrayed against them, are never made light of. Nor is their fearlessness to be the product of studied ignorance concerning the power of their enemy. It is based on the assured fact that "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Again and again we lose consciousness of this, and are distressed and weakened by our fear of eventualities which can never materialize since God is God. Things that are seen are so insistent in their demand for attention, that we forget their ephemeral character, and come to regard them as the strongest realities of life. Whereas, in fact, it is the things that are not seen which are the strongest forces of all, and which are always on the side of those who side with God.

We do not well : this day is a day of good tidings,
and we hold our peace.

IT is not to be wondered at that the lepers who discovered the stricken state of the camp of Syria should, on the impulse of their discovery, make free with the spoil. In their wretchedness and poverty the opportunity of eating and drinking, and of acquiring treasure also, quite naturally carried them away. But upon the heels of their first impulse came the remembrance of the state of their friends in the beleaguered city. With their own appetites satisfied, a conviction of the selfishness of thinking only of themselves came upon them. The ethics of the situation declared themselves ; and, as is ever the case in such circumstances, conscience awoke to a sense of responsibility. Hence, flinging off all the restraint imposed by their condition, they came to the city, from whence they had been long excluded, with tidings which were a veritable gospel. That their action is full of significance, as illustrating the obligation which rests upon those who have discovered the enrichment which Christ's victory has brought to men, is clearly obvious.

The day in which we live is indeed one of good tidings. The Evangel of the Son of God has brought within our reach the unsearchable riches of pardon and peace. Life has become new, since our every need has been supplied in Him ; and this blessing is not exclusively ours. He died, " not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world " ; and the duty of declaring the glad tidings everywhere rests upon each of us. If we hold our peace, our silence is criminal. For He depends upon our embassy, and the world perishes for lack of the Bread which we can put within its reach.

The Lord would not destroy Judah for David His servant's sake.

UNDER the reign of Jehoshaphat, and the pernicious influence of the daughter of Ahab, the land sank to a moral level which was a denial of all that it had ever stood for in the faith of God. The worship of Baal, with its attendant abominations, had degraded every instinct of religion, and "like king, like people" had become the established order. That God's indignation should be kindled was only in keeping with His character as the Holy One. That the land was not destroyed for its iniquity was tribute to His faithfulness. For He had bound Himself by an oath to David, to which He could not be untrue. Nothing is more striking in Old Testament history than the Divine constancy to the Covenant. The Oath of God was at all times the confidence of His people, even when they had become untrue to the implicates of relationship with Him, both as individuals and as a nation. Thus is anticipated His eternal faithfulness to the promises made in Christ.

Did God but deal with us as we deserve, the stroke of punishment had long since fallen and destroyed us. Our sins have eternally separated us from Him, attesting our utter unfitness for fellowship with the Holy and True. Yet, for Christ's sake, He does not destroy us. In the counsels of Eternity the Father made covenant with the Son, on which sure foundation rests the salvation of a lost world. It is for Christ's sake, and for His sake alone, that righteous wrath is turned away, and unspeakable mercy unto Eternal Life bestowed upon us.

What hast thou to do with peace ?

STRONG in the confidence with which the kingly anointing inspired him, Jehu would hold no parley with the messengers of Joram. As God's chosen sovereign, he was in necessary hostility to the king who had outraged His commandments and forfeited His confidence. There could be no making of peace between these two men who found themselves rivals by reason of the individual attitude of each towards the God of Israel. Jehu must overthrow the wickedness of Joram if he would be true to the Divine commission, and himself realize the Divine purpose. When any man is at peace with God, he is of necessity at war with evil. Thus Jehu's peremptory reply to the king's messengers was not an evidence of churlishness, but of the intensity of his loyal purpose. He was one of the Old Testament heroes who began life, at any rate, by fearing man little because he feared God much.

Like Jehu, all who are in Christ have been anointed with the Holy Spirit for the service of His Kingdom ; and it is well to bear in mind at all times that this involves active opposition to everything in the world which exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Christian discipleship is never a mere passivity. Union with Him not only means fellowship with all who are His friends, but strenuous hostility to all who are His foes. To make terms of peace with the world is treachery, since He came not "to send peace, but a sword." None can evade the hard service of good soldiers except by disavowing their allegiance to "the Captain of our salvation."

Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.

HOW easy is it for a man who begins on the highest levels of fidelity and courage to fail in maintaining his fellowship with the Lord ! Jehu is only one more warning example of the peril which lurks in success. If victory does not humble men's hearts, it hardens them, and all unwittingly and imperceptibly they drift from their early allegiance, and forfeit the favour which alone is life. Jehu's fall is distinctly attributed to heedlessness. That is, he was morally careless—doubtless imagining that small disobediences were negligible. Like dry rot, however, they ate into his being and ultimately destroyed him. He made the fatal mistake of imagining it possible to carry out his Godward obligation by anything less than the full devotion and energy of his heart.

It is always perilously easy to drift from our first intentions ; nor does the current ever set in so strongly as in the hour of spiritual prosperity. To presume upon the fact that God has graciously fulfilled His word in giving victory over foes, and evidenced His favour by the bestowal of blessing, is to court disaster. Fellowship with Him is only maintained by constant vigilance, dependence, and obedience. Men most frequently fall by concluding that, because they have been used of God in the past, anything less than the undivided love of their hearts is a sufficient expression of their faith. Yet none of us is indispensable to Him. And it is for our ultimate salvation that He withholds blessing in order to make us know ourselves. It is of His love that when we do not humble ourselves we are humbled.

He brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him.

THE bringing forth of Joash by Jehoiada, and his coronation, is one of the most moving scenes in the history of Judah. The plot of Athaliah to destroy the seed royal had been frustrated, and the young king had been kept in hiding until the hour came for presenting him to the people. Throughout, Jehoiada the priest acted under Divine direction, and hence the acclamation of the young sovereign had a deeply religious significance. His reign, thus inaugurated in the fear of God, was a period of blessing, for the recognition of God's Covenant with which it began was continued as Joash grew from boyhood to manhood. It is no unnatural straining which sees in his acceptance and enthronement by the people a foreshadowing of the coronation and reign of Him of Whom the priesthood and kingship of Old Testament days were but an anticipation.

Christ is offered to men as both Saviour and Sovereign, and in this order. Victor over all the malignity of the enemy which would have destroyed Him, He claims the right of government, and promises its blessing in every life on the grounds of His conquest. And life only begins for any one of us when we put the crown of our being upon His brow. Then, in fulfilment of our obligations, we begin to labour for His enthronement in the whole world which is the object of His redemption. And our every faithful service hastens the glad day of His Return, when once again love shall enthrone Him as Lord of all. Let this be the objective of faith's energy.

For they dealt faithfully.

THESE anonymous workmen, to whom was committed the task of repairing the House of the Lord, needed no human oversight. Quite evidently they realized the sacred nature of their toil, and wrought as unto God Himself. It was this which lifted them above all necessity of scrutiny by the priests. Nor was there need either to bargain with them, or to require account of the money entrusted for their payment. Their character of fidelity toward God, and consequent honesty toward men, was a matter of common knowledge ; and they stand out conspicuously as ideal workmen. No worthier record could be imagined than just these words : " They dealt faithfully."

This is the whole duty of the believer. Faithfulness toward God of necessity involves a like attitude toward every human obligation. Its root is to be sought in responsive and grateful love to Him. Where this fails, faithfulness is never seen. For love's compulsion is the strongest of all moral forces, and love is measured, not by the volume of its profession, but by the actual value of its self-sacrificing devotion to the interest of Him Who is its object. We fail to make life worthy when we fail in this realm. This is why so many professing Christian lives will not bear the close scrutiny of those who can only measure their worth by visible devotion to recognized duty. They may, and do, criticize and condemn every faithless inconsistency. But He grieves over every hidden failure of the heart's affection.

Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times.

THE dying prophet made no secret of the meaning of his command to the king of Israel to shoot with bow and arrows through the opened window. Each arrow shot by the king was the symbol of the Lord's deliverance of the nation from Syria. Thus the king's faith was put to the test. He might have the assurance of victory to whatever extent He wished ; but his faith carried him no farther than a thrice-repeated conquest. For having shot three arrows, he stopped, virtually declaring by this action that this is all he believed God could, or would do for him. There is little wonder that the indignation of the prophet, whose whole life had been a declaration of God's faithfulness, and an example of the power of faith in Him, was stirred.

"According to your faith be it unto you," is the Divine rule in regard to trusting God for the fulfilment of His promises. Like Joash, we too often limit the Holy One of Israel in our expectations and confidence, and well deserve His own rebuke : "Oh, ye of little faith !" We, as it were, shoot the arrows of prayer all too infrequently, and, in consequence, do not experience anything like promised fulness of His power in our lives. Instead of praying continually, and honouring Him by trusting Him for large things, we are content to ask and receive a pittance only. While all the time "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," yet He waits to be inquired of ere He manifests Himself in and through us.

Yet not like David, his father.

AMAZIAH only yielded partial obedience to the commandments of the Lord. That His ways were known to him is not a matter of doubt, for had it been otherwise no guilt would have attached to his short-coming. It would almost seem as though he endeavoured to make the best of both worlds—to secure the favour of God and, at the same time, to gain for himself the temporary advantages of worldliness. He had before his eyes examples both of warning and encouragement; for other kings before him had endeavoured to tread the path of compromise, only to find it destructive of the truest well-being of the kingdom. David, his great ancestor, despite personal failures to maintain his covenanted obedience, had yet never forfeited his relationship with God. He had manifested the possibility of a man of moral frailty so living as to be “after God’s own heart”; and to this same course of fundamental fidelity all his successors were committed, alike by his influence and their own vows. It was in this respect that Amaziah fell short of the standard, with great loss both to himself and to the nation.

This same warning note runs throughout Scripture, declaring that God must be worshipped and served with “all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” Like Amaziah, however, there are many who offer to Him only a divided heart. They go so far in the way of His commandments, but when conflict between His Will and personal convenience becomes inevitable, their ultimate decision is cast on the self-side of the issue. It is on this account that His presence and power is lost to many a believer.

And so it came to pass.

THE abiding value of this record of the succession of Israel's kings is in its fulfilment of the Word of God. His promise made to Jehu was literally accomplished as a testimony to His faithfulness before the people. Amid all the fluctuating fortunes of those who, from time to time, sat upon the throne, His purpose moved steadily forward. Independent of their sincerity and shortcoming alike, He brought about the establishment of His own Covenant, so that the nation was never without present intimation of His sovereignty over all. Other nations might do as their rulers pleased without reference to any controlling authority; but for Israel, God's Law was inviolate. Its declarations, both of blessing and of punishment, were always certain of fulfilment.

It is good for us at all times to remember that seeming delay in regard to the carrying out of His Word is never to be regarded as any slackening of God's intention. That He moves slowly is part of His self-revelation. For with Him "a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years." The history of each individual life, moreover, attests the sureness of His pledges. For, looking back, there is not one who has not in his own life indubitable evidence of His unchangeableness. And even though now we do not see all the expectations we have based upon His promises fulfilled, one day in the Glory we shall review 'all the way' by which we have been led, and shall declare concerning His Word—"and so it came to pass."

Come up, and save me out of the band of the king of Syria.

THIS is the record of an immeasurable mistake. Threatened, as he was, by the Syrian armies, Ahaz became terrified ; and instead of crying to the Lord, of Whose faithfulness he had abundant evidence, he made a league with the king of Assyria. And in so seeking his help he virtually made a yoke for his own neck. The help of Assyria might be effective in checking the immediate aggression of his enemy, but ultimately he found himself in the power of his strong ally. By forsaking its dependence upon God the nation lost its independence, and finally became Assyria's vassal. Had Ahaz but sought help of God in this critical hour, how different had been the course of subsequent history !

The mistake of trusting in the arm of flesh, and of relying upon the world for help, instead of maintaining faith in God, is one of which His Church has often been guilty. Like Ahaz, she has called for the help of the world in her warfare, only to find herself ultimately fettered and bound by the world, dominated by its spirit, and impoverished by its control. If, for instance, instead of appealing to the world for financial support for the work of God, His people wholly relied upon His promises, they would be in a position of independence, which would enable them boldly to rebuke the world's sin, and to declare the wrath of God against its iniquities. When we become reliant upon the ungodly world, as Israel did in regard to Assyria, it is always with the same result. What a contradiction is such a calamity to the Evangel which declares that Christ "gave Himself that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the Will of God !"

They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.

THE conduct of these men from Babylon, brought to Samaria to replace the original inhabitants by the king of Assyria, forms a striking picture of what is always a tendency with those who are brought into contact with the claims of God. In this instance, it was His power exerted for the punishment of their idolatries, which gave them rudimentary knowledge of His nature. The devastation caused by the lions which He sent among them, aroused something like a desire to propitiate Him, and hence they adopted a scheme of patronage. While not abandoning their idol-worship, they accorded Him a share of their religious observance. But their hearts were in no way, surrendered to His will. They feared Him because of his resources of wrath, but their real allegiance was rendered to their own gods in whose service they could give free rein to every selfish and passionate impulse.

This is the crowning insincerity of a large amount of the professed religion of our day. Men have a kind of fear of God, which is not, however, "the beginning of wisdom" but the sum total of folly. They are afraid of His judgments, but do not, in any sense, tremble at His Word, nor give themselves to its obedience. Their real gods are the things which minister to personal advantage and material well-being. The warning message to all such—and none of us is immune from the peril of drifting into this state—is the word which declares, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."

He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.

HEZEKIAH stands out conspicuously as the king who, above all others, served God with a faithful heart. Under his reign the land reached a level of religious life higher and purer than it had ever known. With intolerance born of true faith he dealt ruthlessly with the idolatries which he found established on his accession, and from the beginning he put God first. That his fidelity could not be maintained without incurring a great deal of opposition from those whose vested interests were disturbed, is obvious. But none of these things moved the king, whose heart trusted in the Lord God of Israel. The record of His faithfulness and power in regard to the affairs of the nation in bygone days, inspired him to confidence which nothing could shake. He believed in His unchangeableness, and relied upon His Covenant. Such a man, with God, is always a victorious majority.

The New Testament establishes beyond doubt the fact that faith is attested by action. Professed trust in God which is not energetic is vain. It is in the application of the principles of God's government to the affairs of personal responsibility that true belief in Him is expressed. The example of Hezekiah, therefore, may well be taken as a test of the worth of our professed belief in God. Are we endeavouring to combat His foes? Do we bend every energy to the establishment of His worship, the extension of His influence, and the strengthening of His cause? Do we by fearless and consistent advocacy of His Sovereignty merit such record as this, "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel"?

Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

THIS is the action of a man who knows in Whom he has believed. The pathway to the Sanctuary was not strange to him, for fellowship with the Lord was as the breath of his life. It had become habitual in him to seek His face continually; and, hence, when this threatening letter was received, he had no hesitancy in determining what to do with it. The most natural thing was to take it to Him, before Whom he had become accustomed to spread all his concerns. There is nothing of panic or fear in his action. He needs direction and protection, and knows whence alone they can come. He has no interests, personal or national, apart from God, and therefore can with confidence bring this disturbing document into His presence, knowing that it concerns God as much as it concerns him.

No man can improvise faith in an emergency. The threatening letter, the frowning calamity, the disturbing menace, the arresting fear, cannot be brought into the house of the Lord and spread before Him with any confidence, unless the whole background of life is one of faith in Him. Assurance of His intervention in the crises of life does not come suddenly to any of us. It is the ordinary days, in which all things are related to His concern and care, which prepare His children for the supreme tests which, sooner or later, come to us all. Hezekiah is to be emulated, not merely in this action, but in the habitual attitude of his soul towards the God Whom he served.

What have they seen in thine house?

THE mistake made by the king in displaying the riches of his house—all of which were God's gifts—had disastrous consequence. On the human side it stirred up the jealousy of these envoys, and inspired the subsequent aggressions of Babylon. On the Divine side it displeased the Lord because it denied, by failing to assert, His glory. Even so may such an outstanding man of faith and character as Hezekiah take a false step, if temptation finds him out of touch with Heaven.

Isaiah's query is of far-reaching significance, both to Hezekiah and to all God's professed children. What the world sees in our houses, that is, in our lives, is of profound importance. It either declares God's glory, and evidences His control, or, on the contrary, dishonours Him. Our profession of faith tacitly invites scrutiny; and men are at all times taking their measure of God, and adopting an attitude toward Him, which corresponds to what they see of the practical outcome of His power in our lives. Alas, that so much in our houses should speak, not of His rule, but of self-will. For how much that is worldly, selfish, trifling, and often positively sinful is to be found there! How much of our energy is expended toward the amassing of earthly goods! How many of our concerns, both of pleasure and business, are far removed from any connection with the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Well may we lay this challenge to heart, determining by His grace that throughout the coming days men shall see in us the manifested life of Christ.

He built altars in the house of the Lord.

AMONG the other evils of Manasseh's reign there stands out conspicuously his degradation of the Temple worship by the erection of altars to heathen deities. It voiced a contumacy which was in entire contradiction to the professed faith of the people, and evidenced a disregard for God's revealed Will which could not fail to bring condign punishment upon him. Such an act was like the flinging down of a proud challenge, which God was not slow to take up. For He is jealous of His honour, and no man, be he king or commoner, can defy Him with impunity. The wilful pride of Manasseh gives the key to those judgments which God declared alike upon him and upon Judah, all of which were fulfilled according to His Word.

A man's method of worshipping God accurately expresses his thought concerning Him and his attitude toward Him. Like a refrain, there runs through Old and New Testaments alike the injunction of the undivided heart. Such commands as "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God with all thy mind"; "Him only shalt thou serve," and their parallels, are words which admit of but one interpretation. God will not be served by anything less than the entire service of His people. He is jealous of His own honour and sovereignty. Indeed were He not so He would be less than the Almighty One. Judgment on those who take another way than His may tarry, but its ultimate stroke is never uncertain. Sooner or later it is brought home to the presumptuous man that God cannot be mocked.

Because thine heart was tender.

THE reign of Josiah was a bright interlude in a long period of national deterioration and darkness. Despite the momentum of the wickedness of previous reigns, and the difficulty of confronting and overturning an established moral order, he courageously did "that which was right in the sight of the Lord." In so doing he gathered to him the best elements of the nation—those who had secretly suffered under the idolatries of Manasseh; and together they sought to bring back the glory of God to the land. Despite every difficulty the young king set himself to re-establish His worship and the glory of His house; and the Divine blessing rested in consequence upon the nation during his days.

A tender heart is the secret of the strong arm and set face, which every religious reform demands. For when a man cultivates sensitiveness of spirit toward the commandments of God, refusing to satisfy himself with anything short of entire obedience, he qualifies himself for receiving reinforcements of grace which multiply his efforts unto victory. To grow cold and careless, however—which many do all unconsciously and imperceptibly to themselves, by neglect of self-examination and discipline—is to forfeit all claim upon His promises. We pray to be made strong, courageous, and influential—nor is it wrong so to make petition. But, above all these, we need to ask for the maintenance of a tender heart by the constant renewal of the Holy Spirit. Without this grace all other gifts are vain.

Keep the passover unto the Lord your God.

IN the midst of his moral reformation of the nation, Josiah calls upon the people to observe the solemnities of the Passover, concerning which during the previous reign they had fallen into sinful neglect. For if the work of cleansing the land of its idolatries, and of all the customs which had flourished unchecked around the worship of false deities is to be effective, it must be the expression of a common religious impulse. As a mere imposition by the king, the new and better order could have no moral significance beyond the limit of his own responsibility. Hence his summons to the people to get back to the God from Whom they have gone astray. The roots of the desired renewal of Judah's life must strike deep into the soil of God's faithfulness.

It is forgetfulness of God which is at the bottom of all defection, whether personal or national. And it is only by a definite return to Him along the road of confession and amendment, by a coming afresh to the Cross of Calvary, of which the Passover was but a foreshadowing, that a new impulse of faithfulness, and a new energy of obedience can be generated. The love there displayed can alone evoke the love which will count all things but loss in order that He may realize the travail of His soul. If once the Great Sacrifice is truly apprehended the whole work of reformation is assured. No other atmosphere but that of the Passover is creative of moral energy sufficient to put away sin and to unswervingly follow after holiness.

Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah.

THE almost monotonous record of the successive kings of Judah who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" is at once a testimony to human perversity and Divine persistence. For despite their waywardness and defection, God did not cease to yearn over His people, and to endeavour to draw them back to fellowship with Himself. When gentler methods were unavailing, He allowed them to taste the bitterness of invasion and defeat, that in their extremity they might have no alternative but to turn to Him. Thus it was that in consequence of the sin of Jehoiakim He permitted Nebuchadnezzar to come up against the land, and along with him, marauding bands also of Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites. Only so could be brought home to king and people the force of God's warning word, and the consciousness of their wilful disregard of its precepts. He is at all times a God of judgment, by Whom actions are fairly weighed.

God's use of unlikely instruments for the carrying out of His Will is one of the lessons written large on the page of His people's history. He makes even the wrath of men to praise Him, and does not hesitate to take up the sword of a heathen nation for the punishment of His rebellious children. For there are conditions in which no argument, but that of pain and suffering and loss, is entirely convincing. By many a harsh-sounding bell His vagrant children are summoned to worship. The draught of bitterness, which again and again they must perforce drink, is Heaven-mixed, and tonic in its action. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar is, in reality, the sword of the Lord unsheathed against all that is subversive of our true life and of His glory.

2 KINGS xxv. 30.

A continual allowance given him of the King, a daily rate for every day.

IT is no far cry from the kindly treatment of Jehoiachin by the king of Babylon to that of the repentant and humble believer at the hand of the Lord. For He it was by Whom the heart of Evil-Merodach was stirred up to deal thus with the exiled king ; and in every detail this record is a reflection of His own attitude and purpose toward them that fear Him. From the humiliation of captivity to the dignity of freedom, from the ignominy of the prison-house to the fellowship of the king's own table, and from the abasement of a slave to the privilege of a son, was the measure of the kindness heaped upon one who had done nothing to merit it. Nor was the grace of the king exhausted by this transformation of the exile's condition. Every succeeding day of his life it was renewed toward him, until the former consciousness of bondage was entirely lost, and the assurance of his new state became a positive and unalterable conviction.

In just this same manner God Himself deals with those who, in various ways, have come to know themselves prisoners, and who cast themselves on His mercy, for ever declared in Christ. The miracle of adoption is no mere theological term, but an experience of triumphant grace, in which a feeble and unworthy man is lifted into conscious fellowship with a Father Who is also a King, and is there established. Then with each new day comes the royal provision for recurring needs. And no day shall ever dawn upon us for the duties and service of which His provision shall be anything less than sufficient.

These are their generations.

A LONG list of names, some well known but the greater number entirely obscure, would seem to have but little spiritual significance and to be almost without moral meaning to men of our own day. Founders of Jewish national life they undoubtedly were, each with his unwritten record of service and influence. Yet all that is told concerning them is the bare fact of their existence and their death. Like links in a chain, however, each one played his part in the development of the race; and passing away handed on the torch of life to another. The lesson of such a bare record—and it is one which every generation needs to lay to heart—is that “no man liveth unto himself.” For good or evil each one added something to the national character. His life, his service, his sins all affected not only those with whom he lived but those who came after.

We are all at times apt to chafe at the littleness of life. Our opportunity of great service is so scant, and the restrictions by which we are hedged around are so many, that we despair of doing anything worthy of record. Yet every hour we are unconsciously weaving an undying influence and casting it over others, as the prophet cast his mantle upon his successor. The little day of life is soon over; but night never falls upon any of us before this work is done. How carefully then should we guard our lives from all that is unworthy. How diligently should we seek to relate every concern to the high purpose of God's glory. How earnestly should we seek to spread the contagion of goodness. “I am only one—but I am one!” may well be our inspiration.

The troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed.

THUS is recorded, in the national genealogy, the tragedy of Achan. Although the offence was dealt with at the time, and the offender put to death, yet upon the records of Israel his name stands covered with undying shame. In a sudden crisis of temptation his nature had declared itself, and by one impulsive act which expressed his true character he had brought defeat upon Israel and swift judgment upon himself. And he is for ever branded with this shame as a warning to those who came after him, and for our learning. This is his eternal reputation ; and wherever his name is mentioned it carries but one memory for all men. With his final attitude to the God of all mercy we need not concern ourselves. To the fact and meaning of this record we must take earnest heed.

Let none of us imagine that any wilful sin of ours—especially such as involves others—is over and done with when the act has faded from our own memory. There are forces set in motion by some forms of sin which nothing can ever entirely arrest. And the memory of this fact is a veritable sanctification. To know myself forgiven by the mercy of God is to stand in a new world indeed. But to know that I have injured another by my now pardoned wilfulness, and that I may yet do so, invests the new life with a seriousness of purpose which inspires, as nothing else can do, a close walk with God and a careful walk with men.

In Hebron . . . he reigned seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years.

THUS is recorded in two well-defined periods David's occupancy of the throne. For upwards of seven years he was only the acknowledged ruler of the people of the south. They had stirred themselves up at the beginning to make him king, and were his loyal subjects. The rest of the land, however, did not recognize him as the Lord's Anointed, and yielded no obedience to his command. They took no part in his campaigns, and while they set up no other king as a rival, their attitude was one of indifferent negation. Not until Israel came into line with Judah and acknowledged him also as their sovereign, did the entire nation begin to realize the good of his reign and the blessing of God which rested upon him.

All this is not only history, but allegory also. David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is rightly the Sovereign of every redeemed life. Yet in how many such is His reign restricted to a small portion of the area of their interests. Many a believer accepts His rule only "so far." There are realms which He may not invade, purposes which are unrelated to His government, possessions which have not passed under His sceptre. Just as David's cause—which was God's—was hindered and weakened by this limitation, so, too, is Christ's work in the world weakened and hindered by similar failure in the lives of His people. For a half-reign is no sovereignty at all; and until Christ can depend upon the entire devotion of those who call Him Lord, they are of no moral support to Him. Moreover, it is only when life is wholly His that His enriching promises are personally realized by His servants.

There they dwelt with the king for his work.

IN this list of those who were connected with the organization of the kingdom in its various branches, it is significant that place should be found for the "potters and those that dwell among plants and hedges." Their work was of a humble and obscure sort, with but little prominence attaching to it, and entirely without popular recognition. Yet they were reckoned as part of the royal establishment. They were as truly the king's servants as were the most exalted officers of the palace. This was doubtless their inspiration to faithful continuance. They were reckoned amongst those who belonged to David. They ate his bread and wore his livery. In their own way, and according to their measure, they contributed to his well-being. All of which was a constant encouragement to their faithfulness.

The heroism of the unapplauded is among the really great things of life. To do service for a great cause in an obscure and unnoticed position demands ampler inspiration than to fill prominent spheres. For when external aids to fidelity are lacking, devotion of the finest sort is necessary to loyal continuance. Nothing is so clearly seen as this in the work of Christ. For the service of His Kingdom demands, of the many, work which attracts little attention and gains little praise. Nor is it possible for any such to fulfil their calling worthily except as they recognize that they belong, indeed, to Him, and unless they experience the upholding strength of His fellowship. It is a good thing for all of us that the King does not Himself disdain to walk in the fields and hedges; but that there in the place where He has appointed us He comes to be our Companion in toil.

Because they put their trust in Him.

IT is thus that the sons of Reuben and their companions were helped against their foes. They were men "able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war," and yet withal they were men of prayer. They realized the futility of their own skill and strength apart from Divine direction and reinforcement. Trained men though they were in the arts of warfare, they did not forbear to cry unto the Lord in their campaigns. It is their undying glory that in this record their prowess and achievements are attributed to faith, which not only sought God's assistances, but inspired obedience to His orders. This is ever the pathway of victory for individuals and nations alike.

Trust in God is the determining factor in every conflict. The foes of the soul are many, and strong, and insistent; and it is well that each of us should learn how to detect their presence and how to concentrate every moral energy upon their resistance—"even unto blood." But no man overcomes them merely by strength of his own purpose, or by completeness of his moral equipment. Except his sword is also the sword of the Lord, he will draw it in vain. Unless his shield is the shield of faith, the fiery darts of the enemy will pierce it to his destruction. Only in the strength of the Lord can any soldier stand in the evil day, and having done all still stand.

And those who thus experience His saving strength are never slow to attribute all the glory of victory to Him.

They ministered before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing.

THE ministry of joyfulness is at all times part of the glory of God. It is not enough that those who were set apart for the service of His House should accomplish their acts of duty with faithfulness. They must sing as they serve. The songs of their lips must express the gladness of their hearts. The House of the Lord must resound with His praise, both as a sacrifice to Him and a witness to all men of the joyous experience which is theirs who dwell in His bond-service. The strongest argument for the reality of His gifts to men is that joy which fills the hearts of those who serve Him with spontaneous gladness. For in a world of change and chance, of trial and sorrow, of disappointment and loss, it is inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that of the reality of Divine and unseen satisfactions.

This is the spirit which in these days we need to recapture. The joy of the Lord's people is part of the light of the world. When we serve Him not only under a sense of duty but with hearts of gladness and voices of song, we bear testimony in powerful fashion to his goodness. For the songs of the Sanctuary are not the mere lightsome lilting of the lips, but are voices of redemption. They that dwell in His House, with a constant sense of the greatness of the Sacrifice by which they have been drawn and are kept near to Him, cannot but sing aloud of His mercy as they serve in the tasks appointed them. And yet how few of us have learned the secret of singing Zion's songs as we work and war.

This brethren came to comfort him.

IT was all that the sons of Ephraim could do for their father in his sorrow. Their brethren had been slain, and his heart was sore grieved. In such an hour deep answers only to deep ; and by lavishing upon him proofs of their love and assurances of their filial devotion, they soothed their father's pain. It speaks well for these otherwise unknown men that this should form their outstanding record. They were men of war, accustomed to the conflict and use of the sword. Yet they preserved a tenderness of heart which made them effective ministers of comfort in the day of sorrow. Herein is testimony to their hidden life. For bad or careless men are never comforters of others. Sympathy demands self-forgetfulness. The holy art of consolation is only acquired by those who keep the windows of their soul open to the breezes from the Heavenly Hills.

The New Testament includes this ministry in the duty of those who have themselves received comfort of God. For He is the God of all comfort. And it should be the aim, as it is the duty, of us all to approximate in ever-increasing degree to His character. Every life is full of opportunity for the exercise of this holy service. Lonely, saddened, and broken hearts are all around us. There are souls who have fallen by the way, and who dumbly cry for the hand-grip of sympathy and strength. Of this sacrament of consolation every believer may be a minister if he is himself living in touch with the Comforter. There is no other secret of readiness.

Utho drove away the inhabitants of Gath.

BY the record of this achievement are the inhabitants of Aijalon kept in perpetual memory. An unknown and otherwise unnoticed people, they nevertheless acquired undying fame in one of Israel's frequent contests with the Philistines. Possibly on this occasion a band came out from Gath bent on pillage and plunder, as was the wont of these enemies. Under Beriah and Shema the townsmen hurled themselves at the foe in defence of their homes, their wives, and little ones. It could not fail to be an uneven contest, since Gath was a military centre of great importance, and its people doubtless strong and warlike. Yet in the strength of God, and with the consciousness of a righteous cause, these little-known men accomplished a victory whose record will remain as long as does the Word of God.

It is by deeds, and not by words of profession, that the value of every life is measured. When the tale of any man's life is told, either here or at the judgment-seat of Christ, it comprises only the deeds done in the body. This is at once its glory and its shame. Noble attempts count as achievements; worthy struggles rank as victories. But the ignoble indifference of those who have never dared anything for Christ, and the careless cowardice of those who have not come to the help of the Lord against the mighty, are set forth as total and culpable failure. Such consideration as this should surely make the professed sons of God hesitate before holding back in the day of battle.

Very able men for the work of the service of the house of God.

THE men whose genealogy is here set forth, and whose occupation was about the House of God, did not acquire their fitness merely by birth into the priestly tribe. Every Levitical enactment respecting those to whom was committed the sacred service of Tabernacle and Temple had a moral significance ; and the men who were set apart for the sacred tasks of sacrifice and worship were thereby made fit to handle holy things. Their ability had infinitely more to do with the moral than the mental or material realms of life. They are set forth as being " very able men for the work of the service of the House of the Lord," because of their submission to His requirements and their obedience to His precepts.

The first requisite for the service of God upon the part of any man is character. His words are the smallest part of his work. What he is counts immeasurably beyond what his official position demands of actual function. The world expects from him a higher type of life than from any other. It is the instinct of all men, whether they are avowedly Christ's or not, that holiness becometh God's House for ever. And only those commend Him, and the Evangel to the proclamation of which they are commissioned, whose lives are transparent and translucent. This is the preparation to which every believer must apply himself if he would fulfil his high calling. And in making his endeavour he may know the certain co-operation of the sanctifying Spirit of God.

So Saul died for his transgression.

THE fact that " the wages of sin is death " is written large throughout the pages of the Sacred Word. Alike with individuals and nations the law of sin and death operates. The mills of God may grind slowly, but they nevertheless work with unerring sureness. The disasters which successively overtook King Saul, and which at length culminated in his death, are directly identified with his sin. Almost from the commencement of his reign he had treated the commandments of God with contumacy. Pride and self-will had gained momentum as he pursued the pathway of disobedience and resistance to Divine direction. And though his punishment was unhurried the end of his sin was never in doubt. For no man, be he king or commoner, can avoid the inevitable consequence of conflict with the Law of God.

God's long-suffering is often misinterpreted as though He allowed men to sin with impunity ; whereas the objective of His grace, expressed in warning and exhortation, is to win the morally wavering to resolute faith and courageous obedience. He is ever seeking to bring men to repentance ; and hence the patience which He expends upon their discipline. The tragedy of many a life, however, is that His goodness is misconceived and His purpose misunderstood. Men go on sinning because they do not really believe the plain statements of His Word. Only when it is too late to make amends and to change life's course, do many realize the grim Nemesis which overtook Saul on Mount Gilboa.

David waxed greater and greater : for the Lord of hosts was with him.

NOT only did David himself ascribe all the good of his reign to the grace of the Lord, but he so honoured Him publicly that others also recognized the secret of his strength and success. Thus it is that the historian makes this record. In the light of what we know of David's life with its ups and downs of moral fitfulness, it is full of encouragement that the outstanding fact of his experience is the continued presence of God with him. For herein is the victory of God's love over human unfitness. It is all of grace that the Divine companionship is not withdrawn, even when in weakness and wilfulness its implicates are disregarded. The man who realizes this cannot but increase in strength, as the measure of his own self-distrust also increases. And all the glory of his life is gladly ascribed to the Lord of hosts.

Many a life which begins well fails to maintain its early levels, and to realize its first promise. Instead of waxing greater and greater, not a few lose their inspiration and fail of the accomplishment of their original purpose. This indeed is the pathetic tragedy of the Christian Church, that large numbers of its members fail to grow in grace and to increase in fitness for the duty of strenuous service. Nor is the secret of their failure at all obscure. For every variation of hidden fellowship with God is faithfully recorded in outward life. God does not impose His presence on those who do not seek Him. The condition of all progress and increase in overcoming strength, is carefully to maintain communion with Him.

I CHRONICLES xii. 38.

Men of war, that could keep rank . . . to make David king.

THEIR common purpose of loyalty to David bound these warriors together. They subordinated every individual interest and jealousy to their supreme objective. This it was that unified their efforts, purified their lives of all that was unworthy, and inspired their energies to the accomplishment of a task which involved the overcoming of many difficulties and the conquest of not a few foes. Their hearts are said to be "perfect," because of the single-eyed motives which animated them. David filled their vision. To see him in his rightful place as king was their passion; and no man reckoned the personal cost to himself if only he could take share in the coronation of his hero.

The vision of a Christ-governed world which is the inspiration of all Christian service, should make it possible for all His servants to "keep rank" as they march to the accomplishment of this purpose. Alas, however, how often do personal considerations make them anything but a united band! In the measure in which that great vision fills heart and mind, will His servants rejoice to be themselves hidden and obscure if they can but contribute anything to the service of the whole, and its glorious consummation. We fail to harmonize with our brethren and to "keep rank with perfect heart" only because we have first failed to comprehend that "for which we have also been apprehended of Christ Jesus." The Christ-filled vision is the only abiding impulse of the Christ-glorifying life.

Let us bring again the Ark of our God to us.

IT is significant that, following on his coronation, the first act of David's reign should be one of signal honour to God. The Ark had long been exiled, and the nation had suffered in consequence. For that visible token of God's presence meant everything to a nation trained as Israel was to recognize Him as supreme Governor. In thus determining to restore it to its proper resting-place, David was leading his people in an act of public recognition of the true source of all good. It is this religious and spiritual significance of his action which gives to it its striking importance. For it meant the re-introduction of God's oversight in their common affairs, the re-establishment of His Law as the final standard of conduct, and the renewal of their loyalty to His declared purpose for the national life. And it declared the faith of king and people in His pardoning mercy.

From how many lives is the Ark of God missing? Crowded with interests and pursuits which conflict with His declared Will, there is little room, and indeed little care, for those things which truly belong to our peace. More serious than anything is the fact that men become accustomed to live without the presence of God, and find the organization of life without the reinforcements of His grace sufficient. Of all states of soul this is the most perilous, for it is the precursor of death. And yet how willing is He Who has been grieved away by our wilfulness, to return to His rightful resting-place, if we but prepare Him a throne by expelling all intruders.

David perceived that the Lord had confirmed him king.

THE outward confirmation of his Divine appointment came to David through the acknowledgment both of his own people and of the surrounding nations. His own spirit was assured and strengthened for all the difficulties to which his office pledged him, by this accession of confidence. His anointing by Samuel had been of a private nature, and throughout the days of Saul there had been little to increase his confidence as to the meaning of that solemn rite. Even after Samuel's death he had only been recognized as sovereign over the southern part of the land ; and it might well have been that his mind was not infrequently invaded by doubt as to the strength of the Divine purpose concerning his occupancy of the throne of Israel. After, however, the Ark is brought back and God is openly acknowledged by king and nation alike, there comes to him this indubitable confirmation of His unchanged Will. Henceforth in the confidence that he has been Divinely called and commissioned, he can face all that kingship involves.

It is often God's way to confirm an inward conviction by outward happenings. When He calls any of His people to serve Him in any capacity, He seldom leaves them to force open the necessary doors. Nor do they have themselves to undertake the task of convincing those concerned that they really have been called of Him. And it is of the love of God that, in a work which is always difficult and beset with opposition, His servants should thus have an assurance which nothing can shake.

God helped the Levites that bare the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

FROM the house of Obed-edom, where it had been temporarily deposited at the beginning of his reign, the Ark was finally brought to its place in Jerusalem. According to commandment, it could only be carried upon the shoulders of the Levites, since they of all the people had been chosen by God to do the service of His House. And it was in the carrying out of this solemn and important duty, with the eyes of the whole nation fastened upon them, that these men realized the Divine help. The recent experience of the venting of God's displeasure in this connexion, invested their task with an awe which could not fail to lift their hearts in supplication to Him. For it would seem that His glory was so closely bound up with the Ark and its contents that the elemental forces of life and death were round about it. It is when men thus realize the seriousness of life's duty that they instinctively turn to Him for the help which is never denied.

The mystery and glory of life is that God condescends to make men His fellow-workers. He could well carry out His purposes without human co-operation—but does not. Through men he deigns to bless men. By the hands of men His gifts are distributed, and by their lips His Word is mediated. Every task which forms part of their lives is of sacramental value. Hence their constant need of His assistance. Alone they can do nothing. Strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man, no task is impossible to them.

I CHRONICLES xvi. II.

Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually.

THIS threefold injunction which forms part of David's psalm of thanksgiving, is one of the great words of the Gospel anticipated in Old Testament days. For herein is the way of all true life and fruitful service. To "seek the Lord" involves no pilgrimage, for He is nigh at hand to all that call upon Him, and is Himself seeking them with an ardent love which will not be denied. In the end it is not the lost sheep which seeks the Shepherd, nor the lost child who finds his way home to the Father. Their crying swiftly brings Him in tender mercy to the relief of the sin-stricken.

And after finding Him, or rather after having been found of Him, the first need of the rescued is of power for the duties and demands of the new life. To "seek His strength," therefore, is the daily endeavour of those who know themselves insufficient. And to all such comes the repeated assurance, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." None need cherish any lurking apprehension of failure, for, in this as in all things else, "every one that asketh receiveth." It is our emptiness which constitutes our sure claim upon God.

"Seek His face continually." For the child needs more than the Father's gifts. He can be satisfied with nothing less than His fellowship. Only the clear shining of His face can give him light in life's many dark days. And he finds his brightness in Christ, by submission of every life-plan and the surrender of every life-energy to His control.

According to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

NATHAN stands out as a type of the truly-surrendered servant of God. Having at first spoken impetuously out of his own heart, and having thus given advice which was contrary to God's purpose, he did not hesitate to humble himself in returning to declare the counsel of the Lord which entirely contradicted his first message. For he had conquered that subtle foe of all those who seek to do God's service—the thought of their own reputation. Hence it was not difficult to abase himself in order that God's Will might be known and done by the one concerned. The disappointment caused to David, which thought might well have deterred him, did not for a moment restrain him, since it was his business to help the king to the realization of God's purpose and the carrying out of His plan.

Nothing but sincere and complete surrender to God and loyal enthronement of His Will as the supreme law of life, will ever enable a man to act as this prophet did under His strong correction. To go back on words already spoken, opinions piously expressed, and conclusions thoughtlessly reached, demands a grace of self-denial which few men possess. And yet, since God's honour is involved, the one who has no higher desire in life than the carrying out of His commands will not hesitate to humble himself on this wise. A man who dwells in the secret of the Lord may yet, like the prophet, make mistaken judgments. But he cannot maintain that holy relationship on any other terms than those which Nathan here fulfilled. For the law of the Heavenly alliance is self-forgetfulness in the larger purposes of His mind.

The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.

HOW safe is the man who is protected by the sure defences of God ! David's foes might rage against him, plotting all manner of mischief, and multiplying themselves for his destruction ; but ere they can touch him they have to break through the permissive and protective Will of God. For David is taking the Divinely-ordered pathway. He is living according to a Heaven-born plan. He can confidently trust God because he is obeying Him. Thus it is that his enemies are robbed of all power to harm him. Again and again it would seem as though superior numbers must prevail against him. But Divine protection is ever victorious over human strategy. What are mere numbers in comparison with the hosts of God ? Thus though David's history is one of almost continuous fighting, the glory of his victories is entirely the Lord's.

Like him, we too are set in the midst of foes, many and strong. From the beginning of the new life until its promises of Heavenly glory are realized, the great adversary contests every inch of ground. And only he is safe who is always and everywhere conscious of being in the place of the Lord's appointment. So long as we do not stray from the plain path of His direction we may claim and experience the same preservation as David had. For it is part of the promise of the Gospel that with those who go forth at His bidding His presence abides. But any presumption, which takes life out of His hands and substitutes selfish plans for His Will, never fails of bitter harvest.

Let the Lord do that which is good in His sight.

JOAB is able to commit the issues of this conflict with the Ammonites to the righteous judgment of God because he is persuaded of its unavoidableness. Under David he stands for a cause which is entirely righteous, and can therefore rely upon the character of God for its ultimate issue. The immediate course of the conflict may be for the discipline of both contestants ; but when the matter involved is such as can be safely and without excuse committed to God, the decision is never uncertain. In this instance Israel was forced to fight on the defensive. Her very position as the favoured people of God exposed her to the jealousy and rapacity of foes whose aggressions it was a religious duty to resist. In such circumstances God's conquering intervention may be relied upon either by nations or individuals. For His interests are inextricably bound up with those of His servants.

The preservation of a clear conscience is of all things most necessary in regard to those circumstances of life, common to us all, in which we find ourselves at variance with others. Many a Christian life is embittered and beclouded by reason of a quarrel whose cause and content cannot be brought into the white light of the Sanctuary without condemnation. Only when we have an inner assurance of blamelessness which harmonizes with the teaching of His Word, can we commit ourselves with confidence to the Lord for His judgment between us and those who oppose us. And only he who is willing to sink his own self-judgment and accept " that which is good in His sight " can pray with any certainty as did Joab on this eve of battle.

And yet again there was war at Gath.

THE Philistines were ever the implacable foes of Israel. Defeated again and again by God's reinforcement of His people's arms, it was as though they refused to accept the verdict of battle to which they appealed, and after each campaign prepared themselves for another onslaught. And yet their unjustified attitude toward the people of God was not altogether without good. For the fact of this continued hostility made them realize their helplessness apart from the Divine protection, and so forced them to keep close to Him in faith and obedience. Had it not been for this constant menace to their peace the devotion of the people would have lacked an altogether necessary spur. Consciousness of danger, however, made them realize that their strength lay in so living as to warrant Heavenly intervention on their behalf.

We are sometimes apt to conclude that life would be at once easier and richer were our contests fewer and our foes less alert and powerful to harm us. Many of us pray for an experience of perfect peace which we fondly imagine will preclude all necessity of enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Yet this is very far from that conception of the ideal life which is variously illustrated in Israel's history, and clearly declared by the Lord Himself. The fact is, our foes are often our greatest helps to fruitfulness. It is our conflicts which make character. For in them we come to know the overcoming grace of God, which otherwise we should never seek. Many of us would be poor indeed, for we should certainly wander far from His feet, were life's hostilities abated.

Satan . . . provoked David to number Israel.

THE instigation of David's pride was a subtle device on the part of the adversary to secure his downfall. Every man, however desirous he may be of living wholly for God's glory, has his vulnerable place—some weak joint in his armour—of which the foe is not slow to take advantage. And David is no exception. God has done great things for him, and hitherto he has had grace to give Him all the glory. Now insidiously the poisoned suggestion lodges in his mind. It is obvious that the evil is not in the mere act of numbering the people, but in the motive to which he has surrendered himself for the time being. So deceitful is the human heart at its best, that what would have once caused him to recoil with horror is now strangely acceptable to a spirit which has lost touch with God.

There is an echo in this episode, with its unspeakable consequences, in David's prayer of later days—"Keep thy servant from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me." By sad experience he learned that to presume upon the goodness of God, and to derogate in any way from His glory, is the greatest of all moral and spiritual disasters. And herein is the strong warning of this incident to us who seek also to be God's servants. For the adversary knows our proneness to pride and self-glory, and does not fail to tempt us in this direction. Our only safety against his devices is to have our eyes at all times fixed on Him Who is the Source of our every good, and Whose is the glory of our every possession and attainment. Large views of Christ have their correlative in low views of self.

Is not the Lord your God with you ?

THUS did David challenge the leading men of the kingdom. Himself hindered from the actual building of the Temple, he devoted every available resource to the work of preparation, gathering the materials necessary for its construction, and influencing the service of those who should be Solomon's helpers. In all this he realized that God was with him. Although it was at His command that he must relinquish the honour of actually raising His House, yet, in the less applauded but no less necessary work of planning and preparing, God did not fail to supply his need and strengthen his hands. It is out of the depth of his own experience that he thus encourages the princes of Israel. He can declare God's faithfulness to them because he has proved it in his own experience.

This is the only abiding inspiration in all work for God. Devotion to a merely historic person, even though it be the Lord Christ Himself, can never generate the passionate impulse by which alone such service can be maintained. To realize His presence, however, and to have a consciousness of His strength in the actual doings of everyday life, afford a sense of security and of courage which is resolute to the fulfilment of every task. This is the secret of the unflagging zeal of His best workers. Since He is with us, why should we ever grow weary ? Since the supply of every need is surely covenanted to faith and obedience, why should any among us ever be feeble in face of the tasks of discipleship ?

To stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord.

AMID all the duties to which the Levites were committed, this stands out conspicuously, because of its appeal to all who like them are dedicated to the service of God by His choice, and committed by their own profession of faith in Him. Much of their work was of an apparently secular character—just the manual labour connected with the offering of sacrifices, and the ordering of the House. Nor would it have been at all difficult on this account for the spirit of devotion to die down in them. When men are largely occupied with material things—even the material things of the Kingdom of God—they are apt to be dominated by them. Under such circumstances it is by no means easy to maintain habits of praise, and a spirit of reverence. Indeed, one is as prone to hardness of heart by reason of familiarity with the outward things of worship, as by such pursuits as are frankly of the world.

Against this tendency, the command that the Levites should mingle their work with thanksgiving, was a Divine safeguard. Morning by morning the duties of the day were to be sanctified by the psalm of praise. Its echo lingered with the singers when they turned to common tasks, and helped them to work and walk worthily of their high calling. And this same exercise will safeguard us also. Prayer and praise must not be left to find a place at haphazard in life. The most definite of our daily appointments should be our tryst in the Sanctuary. There alone can life be purified and saved from everything unworthy.

To come into the house of the Lord . . . as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him.

THE service of the sons of Aaron was not to be undertaken according to their own caprice, or at the fitfulness of their own desires. Each family must sustain a personal relationship to God's plan, and carry out its appointed task at His ordering. Thus was confusion avoided, and the whole area of the work covered, while each worker was made to realize his individual responsibility to God. Nothing could so surely inspire them to faithfulness as the consciousness that they wrought at His commission, and that their service really mattered in the work of His House. When men are thus assured, their best energies are inevitably called forth.

It is significant that in the Bible the fact of God's forethought is constantly emphasized. Especially is this so in respect of the translation of His people's devotion into practical service. Nothing is ever left to chance, for the work of the Kingdom is of supreme importance. Direction is unfailingly given to each servant; and only by doing his appointed task can each help forward the entire enterprise of the Kingdom. We are all prone at times to desire other work than that which falls to our share. Fields beyond our own look fairer, and tasks other than those at which we must toil appear easier. Yet to take any other path than that which God commands is to court ultimate disaster. When we are just where He would have us be, and doing just what He bids, we may trust Him for anything. But only then.

To give thanks and to praise the Lord.

THE sons of Jeduthun were separated unto the Lord to lead the praises of His people. It was their part to set the high note of thanksgiving upon which the assembly should pitch its worship; and it is safe to infer that for such service they themselves needed to live in constant remembrance of His goodness, and of the many causes for thanksgiving with which the lives of God's people are at all times full. Otherwise their songs would have been but hollow lip-service which has no value. Their hearts must tune their voices, and their whole being must be full of gratitude to Him, if they are to help others to "forget not all His benefits." Theirs was a high privilege indeed, which demanded that each one in his own soul lived among the ultimate realities of God's grace.

It is part of the responsibility of all who profess His Name to promote the spirit of thanksgiving. The world is full of gloom, and many round about us are walking in darkness. A praiseful heart, which ever and anon sings the songs of the Lord with gladness, is as the light of life. Many a weary one has been led Home by the music of the Gospel sung in the dark by some praiseful believer. For such songs inevitably lead to questions regarding their impulses. And thus are the fresh springs of God discovered by many who in life's desert would otherwise miss them. It may be that we cannot do much toward the extension of Christ's Kingdom; but we can all do this, since His mercies toward us are beyond count.

In all the business of the Lord, and in the service of the king.

IT is most significant that the responsibility of these thousand and seven hundred officers should be described in this order. Their prime duty was toward God. Their chief concern was His business. They were first and foremost His men. Their military and civil service under the king proceeded from this relationship. The higher loyalty governed and sanctified the lower. They were good soldiers because they were first of all good men. The king could depend upon their fidelity because they sustained a relationship with Heaven, each of them under the scrutiny from which no secrets are hid. Such men are the strength of any nation, for independence and integrity ever go hand in hand. They did not fear to be in a minority, nor to espouse unpopular causes, nor to toil at unapplauded tasks, since they lived for the approval of the Lord God. Of these men the world is always in need.

How often this order of things is practically reversed in the lives of those who profess the faith of Christ. Life's demands are so urgent, and its duties so insistent, that we are apt to lose sight of our supreme responsibility in endeavouring to fulfil the secondary. The claims of an earthly master must be met, for thereon hang our material prosperities. This fact too frequently blinds us to what, after all, is the first charge upon our consecrated energies. For the man who fails toward God fails entirely. Indeed it is only by taking everything as part of the service of His Kingdom that we are saved from disappointing the justified expectations of those amongst whom we live.

Over the cellars of oil was Joash.

HERE is a record of service which might well have been overlooked had not the Divine Spirit controlled the compilation of these Scriptures. In a single sentence it tells of a life of faithfulness in an obscure position, unlikely to receive popular recognition. To Joash was committed the care of the oil-cellars, where was stored the oil for the lamps of the Sanctuary. He it was who saw to it that there was always sufficient for the necessary replenishment of the lights which played such important part in the worship of the House of God. Any dereliction of duty on his part must cause embarrassment also to Priest and Levite in their ordering of service and sacrifice. Upon his faithfulness depended their efficiency. And he is a type of those hidden workers in the Kingdom upon whose loyal discharge of duty far more depends than is commonly remembered.

Many a prominent worker and many a successful enterprise is supported by the ministry of some who are never known to the Church at large. The oil of grace which keeps many a lamp of witness brightly shining is ministered by the prayer and gift of humble folk, whose names find no place in any human chronicle. But He, the Great Head of the Church, appraises their service at its true value ; and in the final reckoning of things, when every man has praise of God, such will be found amongst the princes of His people. These are they whose love to Himself is, in the sight of the Lord, of great price.

Take heed now . . . be strong and do it.

DAVID'S personal disappointment in regard to the building of the Temple only served to make him the more earnest that nothing should hinder the accomplishment of this task by his son. Having prepared the material, and thus made possible the carrying out of this cherished design, he is concerned above all things that nothing should interfere with the project. He fears lest any influence should deter him from carrying out the commission Divinely laid upon him, knowing full well that such an enterprise can never be effected apart from the overcoming of difficulty and the disregard of dissuasion and opposition. He is sufficiently acquainted with life to know that nothing worthy is ever accomplished except by strenuous determination and unflagging persistence. Hence his injunction to Solomon.

It is easy to fall into the fatal habit of dreaming about the work of the Lord, and of being content with the dream rather than with the doing of it. Many an one is satisfied with doing little more than sympathize in a general way with projects for the extension of Christ's Kingdom, and the upbuilding of the spiritual Temple. And not a few delude themselves into the belief that they are servants when they are mere sentimentalists. To all such this word of David applies: "Be strong and do it!" For the strength of God is only imparted to men of action. All the resources of His grace are available to the one who sets himself to do His bidding. But none of the promises are fulfilled to the emotional dreamer.

We are strangers before Thee and sojourners.

IN all the varied changes of his life David had preserved the spirit of the pilgrim. Rightly understood, the record of his life is of a journey toward a heavenly goal. That it led him to the throne, was but an incident. Every experience of conflict and conquest, of loneliness and love, of peace and prosperity, had its spiritual meaning and message for him. At all times he recognized God as his guide, and was hence unable to rest in any passing experience however desirable. Thus, despite fitful failure of faith and occasional uncertainty of impulse and aim, he was ever pressing on toward that life in which alone every awakened longing of his soul could be satisfied.

The cultivation of this pilgrim spirit is one of the most needed pursuits of the Christian life. Earth has a tendency to become despotic. Its tasks and toys alike grip the soul with an iron hand, and detain its progress Heavenward. And it is only by living as one called to follow in the steps of Him Who was Himself a pilgrim that any of us can escape the snare and overcome the seduction of which the world is full. For the true pilgrim, while never contemptuous of earth, is lifted above all undue consideration of its gifts and glamour by the purity and passion of his inspired aim. And as he journeys he blesses the land of his sojourn, leaving behind him a track of light in which others shall see the Way of Life. In the last analysis it is the pilgrim who wields the strongest influence for God upon his day and generation.

Solomon came from his journey . . . and reigned over Israel.

FROM interview and fellowship with the Lord God, Solomon came down to assume the task of sovereignty. Confronted with responsibilities before which the stoutest heart might well be afraid, he is supported by the Divine assurance that nothing of all that he may need for the worthy discharge of his high duties shall fail him. In humility of heart he has sought the face of God, and in rare self-abnegation has asked of Him fitness for the ruling of the kingdom, rather than anything of merely personal advantage. To such an attitude God can only respond in one way. Consistent with His nature, He establishes His servant in the certain knowledge of His upholding and guidance. Hence the courage with which he ascends the throne. He has become a little child, and is thus qualified to lead his people as he himself is led of God.

The Word of God lays consistent emphasis upon the necessity of preparation for the serious duty of life. From Moses in the Desert, down to Christ in Nazareth, and Paul in Arabia, it contains the record of a long line of God's servants who have found in the secret of His presence the only way of fitness for their life-work. And these things are written for our learning. We dare not presume to enter upon the life of any day, with its entirely unknown calls, apart from the preparation of the Sanctuary. We must not take up one task in the power of past experience, unless we court disastrous failure. To be with God, alone makes all things possible to His servants.

But who is able to build Him an house ?

PLEDGED to the task of building the Temple, Solomon is awed by its magnitude. It has been made abundantly clear to him that every detail must be according to the Divine plan and that his own resources of every sort must be entirely devoted to the carrying out of such a service. Conscious though he is that it is God's work for him, and that all the riches of the nation are at his disposal, he is yet more conscious of his own insufficiency. His vision of God had deepened his sense of personal unworthiness, and had delivered him from anything akin to self-confidence. Herein lay his safety in undertaking such a task. So long as he kept before him the height of this ideal, and sought to realize that the House of God must excel in actual and symbolical beauty everything of earth, he could not fail to seek those reinforcements of grace, in the power of which men are alone able to work to His glory.

The cultivation of high ideals is one of those things which as Christians we need to have constantly pressed upon us. Like coins which lose the sharp definition of their image and superscription, by passing from hand to hand in the course of circulation, our ideals are apt to become blurred and indistinct in our contacts with a world whose spirit they so entirely contradict. Even in regard to God's work this is true. We are prone to estimate it lightly, and in consequence to engage in it unworthily, whenever we lose the sense that its every detail is designed for His glory. The only safeguard against such danger is to live much in His presence.

Where the Lord appeared unto David his father.

THE real foundation of the Temple was not that which men saw. The threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite was merely its site. It was in reality built upon the vision in which God had appeared to David, declaring His mind and promising His good-will. This was Solomon's assurance. The faithfulness of God was the solid rock upon which everything rested. On this account he had no fear as to the ultimate issue of his labour nor of the sufficiency of his resources. And it is more than an undesigned coincidence that the foundations should be laid in the very place in which God had appeared to his father. For thus was expressed the deepest faith that was in him. He realized that God was unchangeable; and sought to have the same vision renewed to him as he carried out the injunctions solemnly laid upon him. It was in this strength—the strength of the Lord God—that he went forward to the doing of such a stupendous piece of work.

All effective work for God begins with a vision of His Will and power. By His Word, by the providential arrangement of life, by the common judgment of His people, He variously impresses His mind upon that of His surrendered servants. And with every call to service comes the enduement of power. For the vision of God means not only light, but life also; and when once this has been experienced no man can doubt his calling and election. The renewal of the vision, daily granted to him who continues to work in humble dependence upon His faithfulness, is an unfailing inspiration.

And the snuffers . . . of pure gold.

THE small as well as the greater details of the Temple furnishing were to be of the highest possible quality. Each was for use in the service of God, and each must reflect His glory. Hence the veriest trifles, such as the snuffers by which the lamps were trimmed, were to be made of gold as pure as that of the great vessels of the Sanctuary. This attention to detail both emphasizes the supreme importance attaching to everything connected with the worship of God, and expresses the comprehensiveness of the consecration of His people. Trifles make or mar perfection; and he who would serve God acceptably must apply all the force of his faith and devotion toward making them contribute worthily to the high purpose of His praise.

We are all inclined to regard some of the smaller duties and responsibilities of the Christian life as being of lesser importance than those which evoke the notice and commendation of others. To the great and high tasks of discipleship we do not fail to devote every consecrated energy. How often, however, are our best efforts marred by inattention and carelessness in regard to things in themselves trifling! We forget that the snuffers, as well as the lamps, must be made of pure gold; and that upon the doing of small and great things alike our best powers must be directed. Consecration means both concentration and comprehension. Failure in these respects robs all else of whatever value it may have.

The glory of the Lord had filled the House of God.

GOD'S response to the dedicated offering of His people was the assertion of His presence in their midst, in a manner at once convincing, uplifting and overawing. Complete in its every detail, the Temple was handed over to Him as the expression of His people's devotion and the pledge of their fidelity. It was perhaps the most complete expression of national faith of which any age holds record. Nor is His answer matched in any other collective experience which was ever granted to a people. It silenced every human voice, strengthened every human resolve, and subdued every human energy. From that glad and solemn hour God was in the midst of His people in very deed, and earth must keep silence before Him.

The life of every believer needs similar sanctification if its issues are to minister to God's glory, and its influence is to be at all times on the side of His honour. It is the very glory of the Gospel that to nothing less than this has He pledged Himself in Christ. When, moved by recognition of His right, any one of his children offers himself a living sacrifice, desirous only of being a means of blessing to the world, and a channel of heavenly grace, He never fails to accept the dedication as on this wise. There may be no Cloud of Glory, for this is no longer the age of a material manifestation of the Divine. But, in very deed and truth, Christ Himself comes in through every open door, and sets up His throne in every surrendered heart. Thence flows every blessing.

Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.

THUS was David encouraged in his disappointment. Although his cherished purpose never came to birth, and his plans never found the accomplishment he desired for them, God saved him from despair, and from the sins of despair, by assuring him of the moral value to himself of this projected service Divinely prohibited. Although he never saw the walls of the Temple rising from the city, the impulse which created them in his own mind had exercised an uplifting ministry in his own soul. He was a better man for having fostered a spiritual and unselfish ideal. His heart had been purified by its own passion ; and although he had not built the House of God he had himself been built up in those elements of strong character which are of great price.

Some of the greatest disappointments of life are in connection with our spiritual desires. Many a man has planned some great endeavour only to find his way hedged up and his purposes thwarted. And many such have lost heart and have even become cynical and bitter in consequence. Yet if the Will of God has been sought, and not the glory of self, we may welcome God's ordering as being the best thing, both for the Kingdom in general and ourselves in particular. For God accepts the motive equally with the material of our offering. It is this certainty which saves disappointment from becoming disaster, and invests His wise overruling with influence upon our lives such as nothing else can convey. By way of our thwarted purposes many of our richest blessings come to us from Heaven.

If my people shall . . . humble themselves.

THIS is God's direction to the people to whom He speaks variously in experiences of calamity. He would have them know that He never willingly nor without purpose afflicts them. Nor does He extend their period of discipline beyond the limit of moral effectiveness. When they feel the pressure of His hand, their business is to get back to Him in humiliation for the despite they have done to his Law, and "to bring forth fruit meet for repentance." National idols must be dethroned as the confirmation of their return to Him. Things in the life of the people which are contrary to His revealed Will must be put away. When His judgments are in the earth His children must learn righteousness, or those days will be prolonged. For their sin frustrates His purpose for the nation's mission. He designs that it shall maintain a world-witness to His existence and character; and hence anything that interferes with this must be dealt with.

Since He is the Unchangeable One, we readily see how appropriate in every way is this word to the circumstances of our own day. Prayer for victory over our national foes can never be answered in the way we expect until there is true confession of national, social, and individual sin. The prayer which only seeks God's help for the conquest of our enemies and for the averting of further sorrow and loss, is doomed to disappointment. On the other hand, He never fails those who seek Him according to this word.

The House of the Lord, and his own house.

THE order of this record is full of meaning. From the commencement of his reign Solomon's chief care had been for the building of the House of the Lord. That accomplished, he could turn to the erection of his own dwelling with a conscience void of offence. His first thoughts were for God and His glory. And this was typical of his entire attitude toward life ; at any rate throughout the earlier part of his life and reign. Herein lay the secret of his prosperities and the strength of his influence. God was enthroned in his heart, and his every effort was directed toward His honour.

Not only is the order significant—God's House first, his own second ; but the fact also of their affinity is thus declared. In Solomon's mind there was the closest connection between his relationship to God and his personal life. He sought to order the one in terms of the other. The line of demarcation between sacred and secular was obliterated. For the same spirit pervaded both—the spirit of loyal devotion to Him.

Herein are lessons for us all. If life is to be worthy of our Christian profession God's claims must always be preferred to selfish desires. Daily life in its incomings and outgoings must be made consistent with the professions of faith we declare in the Sanctuary. Every aspect of life must harmonize with its central devotion. This is the secret of abiding influence. And to fail in this respect is to fail entirely.

The one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me.

THUS did the Queen of Sheba confess the effect made upon her by her visit to Solomon. She had journeyed to Jerusalem having heard in her own land something of his fame, only to find that the realization entirely exceeded her greatest anticipation. All unknowingly she had come to see a man whose wisdom was not his own, but who had been endowed by God for the carrying out of His commission. For the first time in her life she had been brought into contact with God through him, and was overawed by evidences of His presence and power she could by no means explain. That she returned to her home as entirely convinced of the God of Israel as she was of Solomon His servant, is not put on record. That this episode was, however, a crisis in her life, is an allowable inference; especially since Christ used the event to condemn the contrasting attitude of men toward Himself.

It is no far cry from this confession to that of those who make personal trial of the things they have heard of Christ, by personally coming to Him. For however high our expectations have been raised, Christ always goes beyond them. Not only His wisdom as interpreting the true meaning of life and the nature of God, but His love and power also, go far out beyond men's dreams. The heart is satisfied of its instincts and the mind of its questions, when first-hand acquaintance with the Lord Christ is sought. And the consciousness that right through life there will yet be inexhaustible riches for our discovery, is an inspiration to daily-renewed discipleship. At most we hear less than half of His glory.

For the cause was of God.

THE failure of Rehoboam to hearken to the wise and moderate counsels of his people, which would have averted the calamity of disruption which came upon the land in consequence of his contumacy, was overruled by God. Not that he was coerced, nor in any way robbed of his power of free-will ; for had he chosen to take the way which every consideration of prudence dictated, God would not have failed to bless him accordingly. A decision, however, which completely flouted every Divine precept for the worthy fulfilment of kingly responsibilities, put him hopelessly out of touch with God's favour. Yet even so, the larger purposes of His will could not be frustrated on this wise. His folly was used to bring about a crisis which has profoundly affected, not only the history of Israel, but indirectly that of the whole world also.

Behind all the seemingly untoward acts of men lies the permissive Will of God. While He does not inspire the fury of Rehoboam, He does permit him to go on unchecked, in order that some large purpose of discipline toward the nation may be brought about. And this event is but illustrative of the processes of grace in all ages. The transformation of the unlikely into positive usefulness is one of the hall-marks of God's power. He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him. If we always realized this, we should not rebel nor repine at some of the experiences which come upon us through no apparent fault of our own. Their cause is of God, and hence their objective is our highest good.

Speak unto Rehoboam . . . king of Judah.

IT was no easy command which was laid upon Shemaiah by the Word of the Lord. Incensed by the revolt under Jeroboam, both king and people were ready for battle. Their national resentment was stirred, and all were determined to overtake and overcome the revolting tribes. To attempt to stop a people in hot-blooded determination, and to interfere with a king bent upon regaining the dominance which his own unwisdom had forfeited, needed courage of a high order. It is never easy to stand before an angry man in an endeavour to turn him from passionate purpose, especially when he holds the power of life and death, as did Rehoboam. But Shemaiah was undaunted, because in his inmost soul he had heard the command of the Lord. This assured His protection, and gave him fearless strength to stand before the impulsive sovereign.

It is of God's goodness that He lays tasks upon His servants to which they are quite unequal apart from the reinforcements of His grace. While His commands are never grievous, they are often overwhelming in their greatness; and challenge our weakness. In no other way could we come to know ourselves as being utterly dependent upon Him for the carrying out of each commission. And with each experience of being thus cast upon Him, the soul of His servant grows. This is the pathway of true liberty. For only he is free who thus learns the necessities and resources of his own life, as the commands of God confront him.

He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

EVIL often proceeds from moral unpreparedness. When men allow themselves to attempt life without God they simply court calamity. The mariner who puts to sea without consulting his chart or adjusting his compasses is merely inviting disaster. In this way Rehoboam utterly failed. He does not seem to have been without some glimmerings of good desire. But he took no pains over the matter of his relationship to God, which is fundamental to all self-control and worthy conduct. Keen on the organization of the kingdom, he nevertheless allowed his moral nature to run riot, and thus fell an easy prey to the temptations which beset every man. The evil record of his life is unerringly traced to its source in this declaration that his heart was not prepared.

This is a story by no means uncommon in our own day. Many men run to excess of evil, only because they have neglected to seek God, and so to prepare themselves for the moral crises which none can avoid. They never intended to do despite to the grace of God, or to repudiate their allegiance. But the hidden process of neglect went on unchecked, until the hour of swift temptation revealed it. Such is the history of many an unexpected failure and startling downfall. It is the secret of many a life in which there is a steady downward drift. Too busy to pray and to give his soul a chance, that man goes out to a day of certain disaster, who any morning discards the proffered help of Divine guidance and safe-keeping. We simply must take time to be holy.

Because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers.

JUDAH'S victory gave no cause for self-gratulation. Inferior in numbers and resource to the ten tribes of Israel, the result of the conflict could only have proved unfavourable to them, but for the help of God earnestly sought and graciously given. It may be that the mere fact of their disproportionate strength urged them to prayer. They had no alternative but to seek God, and in doing so to order their part in the contest so as to secure His approval. For it is idle for an individual or a nation to expect Divine help unless the cause involved is such as He can bless, and unless the methods by which the desired end is sought are consonant with His declared Will. Assured of these premises, Judah could confidently rely upon His faithfulness. Nor did they find their confidence misplaced.

The oppositions and tests of life are designed not only to bring to our consciousness the fact of our human insufficiency, but to discover also the direction of our reliance. All the conflicts in which the believer is inevitably involved, both in the realm of his own spiritual life and as part of his service for the Lord in the world, test not merely his powers of endurance but his place of dependence. In peaceful days habits of trust in God are acquired. No man is able to extemporize faith in a hurry when the battle is joined. It is our ordinary days which determine the result of our contests with the foe. We need more than anything else to make reliance upon God habitual, until it becomes instinctive.

We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.

THE prayer of Asa has found echo in many hearts in all the ages. Confidence that God's power is uninfluenced by any consideration of human resource, inspired him with a spirit of courage which communicated itself to the whole people. Large conceptions of God's might, and of His care for His own, banished all fear. Consequently, with hearts at rest from all apprehension regarding the outcome of the battle, and with no lurking fear that the enemy might prove too subtle or strong for them, they went forth in the Name of God. Emancipated from all weakening uncertainty, they were energized to undertake the seemingly impossible. In the Name of the Lord their banners were set up. Their trial was hence turned to triumph, and their faith crowned with victory.

These are obviously complementary aspects of the life of faith—resting in God, and going forth in His Name. Devotion and service, communion and conflict, worship and work, go to make up the life of each one of us. Nor can these be dissevered without doing despite to the Spirit of Grace, and without incurring serious calamity to ourselves. Religion which consists of nothing beyond prayer and subjective experience degenerates into mere fanaticism. On the other hand, the religion which has no expression other than work, and the striving to accomplish philanthropic conquests and reformations, is sheer presumption. The man who rests on God's faithfulness must go forth to meet His foes and to do His service. The man who thus goes out into a hostile world, must rest on Him Whose grace alone is sufficient.

2 CHRONICLES XV. 17.

But the high places were not taken away out of Israel.

THE reformation under Asa was all but complete. With wonderful courage—the courage of faith in God—he effected startling and radical changes in the life of the nation. Fired with zeal against idolatry and all its pollutions, he went so far as to remove his own mother from her royal position because of her patronage of false gods. He powerfully influenced the nation to enter into covenant with God; and the land was filled with the glad rejoicing of a people whose fellowship with Heaven had been renewed. Yet he stopped short of making an entire end of the idolatry which had caused all the former backsliding. He left the high places intact—a dangerous thing to do. For they represented, as it were, an open invitation to the unclean spirit to return to the house whence it had been expelled, only to find it empty, swept, and garnished for further habitation and fuller control. The subsequent history of his life and of the land, records the fact that this incomplete obedience to the Lord's Word was his ultimate undoing.

Nothing but drastic dealing not only with sin but with its causes, as far as these are within our power, is effective in any human life which seeks the glory of God. All possibility of re-establishing idols once dethroned must be guarded against. Each man must, with his own hands, tear down the high places and set up the Altar of the Lord in their place, if he would know the fulness of His blessing and the continuance of His favour. Consecration which does not lead to this is simply self-delusion.

Because thou hast . . . not relied on the Lord thy God.

ASA'S alliance with the king of Syria proved disastrous. Soliciting his help against Israel, he paid dearly for the temporary advantage which it gave; for he was but bringing in a stronger enemy, who, having served his turn, would ultimately become his oppressor. He was punished by his own invention, as men often are when they forsake the arm of the Lord for the arm of the flesh. His defection was in the nature of a denial of all God's past goodness to him, for, in his own life, he had abundant evidence of the Divine faithfulness. His personal downfall, in which the kingdom of Judah was likewise involved, is recorded as a strong warning against departure from the living God.

The walk of faith has in every age demanded high courage. It is never easy to prefer heavenly alliances to those of earth, especially when the visible resources of the latter are readily available. The promises of God are apt to seem a trifle distant and illusory when one is in a crisis which calls for immediate help. That is the hour of greatest danger. To turn then to human patronage is a denial of God's Covenant. Compromise inevitably tends to ultimate trouble and defeat. For we cannot avoid coming under the power of our alliances. Every exercise of faith in God brings us increasingly under His control—to our highest good. But reliance on material help brings us under the domination of a tyrant world. And the enemy never foregoes a single item of his claim.

His heart was lifted ("encouraged"—*marg.*) up in the ways of the Lord.

IT is the creditable record of Jehoshaphat that "he walked in the first ways of his father David, and not after the doings of Israel." To such faith and obedience God responded, as He ever does, by giving to him victory and establishment. As he progressed his courage rose with every experience of God's faithfulness, so that he did not shrink from dealing drastically with the idol-altars and groves which had been set up throughout the land. Not that difficulties became fewer or opposition less marked, for under the circumstances this is most unlikely. But with every step of faith and every act of loyalty came reinforcements of inspiration and energy. The reward of his faithfulness was entrustment with further service and commission to sterner conflict. This is at all times the pathway of the God-fearing man.

We are apt to look for approval in wrong directions, and to read it where in reality it is not recorded. The servant of Christ whose work brings popularity and prominence, is not infrequently betrayed into regarding these things as his true encouragements. Under the spell of them he is apt to settle down to selfish enjoyment of the fruits of his attainment; whereas the marks of God's favour are often far otherwise. It is enough for the disciple that he be as His Master; and how conspicuously were such signs absent from His life! He was encouraged to go on by the inward approval of conscience and the commending voice of God. Like Him, we too are encouraged to go forward to yet harder tasks, not by outward appreciation, but by the renewed inspiration of the Spirit of God.

As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak.

MICAHIAH scorned the patronage of a king who scorned God. His was the brave faith which does not fear the consequence of fidelity, nor hesitate to speak unpopular words when they are God's message. The temptation to meet the wishes of the monarch who had been compelled to send for him was no doubt great, for nothing is more specious than the suggestion that high-placed patronage may increase the influence of the one who seeks to do God's service. His reply to the king's overtures is expressive of a great soul, to whom God meant too much to permit of any trifling with His commission. In ordinary days he had accustomed himself to live in fellowship with Him. When confronted thus with the necessity of courageous choice he did not hesitate.

Integrity is the secret and guarantee of spiritual independence. The servant of God who allows himself to seek after lower approvals ultimately comes into bondage to them. The favour and fear of man alike bring a snare, in which, alas ! many men are taken. Our only safeguard is so to live as to make the hearing of His voice possible ; for with His message comes His might also. On the other hand, to live carelessly is to make moral failure certain, when unpremeditated choice must be made between the alternative pathways of popularity and faithfulness. The consciousness of God is at once our inspiration and safeguard.

Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good.

THIS word was not, as might first appear, spoken to soldiers but to the Priests and Levites, whose part was to do the service of the House of God. For even they, in the shelter of their calling, were not immune from temptation to faint-heartedness. Their foes might be of a different order from those which must be met in the open field, but courage of the highest sort is nevertheless needed if they are to be successfully overcome. Engagement with holy things is in itself, not only no protection from assault but actually an occasion of special peril. It was, for instance, always easy for the priest who had to stand between God and men, to weaken the declarations of His Will in order to secure the favourable regard of those affected thereby. To round off the sharp edges of the Law in order to propitiate those whom it condemned was an ever-present danger. Hence this exhortation to deal courageously in the ministry of holy things.

God is always on the side of the man who scouts the inconveniences of fidelity to Him. The faint-hearted, who temporize in situations of difficulty, merely forfeit the help of His grace. For it is impossible for any to maintain unbroken fellowship with the Christ Who stands for a courageous doing of the Heavenly Will, who are not themselves prepared at all costs to be inflexibly true. There must always be a moral affinity between the Master and the disciples, the Lord and the servants, the Captain and the soldiers. It is to this fact that such a record recalls us.

The battle is not yours, but God's.

THUS was Judah assured in an entirely righteous conflict. God's help could be relied upon because it was His own cause which was involved in the issue. Convinced of this, His people need have no anxiety as to the outcome. They were not in the position of those who claimed Him as an ally, so much as those whom He had called into alliance with Himself. Hence they did not require as their first duty to ask His blessing upon their plans, but rather to set themselves in obedience to His already declared direction. It was His responsibility to order the conflict, and theirs implicitly to obey. On this wise was His glory established and their well-being assured.

Nothing but living faith in the reality of His power and the security of His presidency is sufficient to keep men calm in a crisis which threatens their peace and well-being. Only when their minds are instinctively stayed upon Him is perfect peace assured to His people. But then it never fails. For then is realized, not as a speculation, but as a certainty, that the whole battle of life is His responsibility. We cannot of ourselves watch the enemy or counter him effectively in any of his devices. He is altogether too elusive and strong for us. But as our eyes are upon Him, and our personal considerations are subordinated to His glory, the Lord organizes victory for obedient weakness. Herein is the unmoved security of His people. Their strength lies not in any valiant increase of their own activities, but in the calm reliance of faith and obedience upon His wisdom and strength.

The Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians.

WHEN men sin, it matters not whether they be kings or humble folk, God's love involves Him in the necessity of warning and discipline. Jehoram had never realized the enormity of his sin had he not been brought up against the immutable Will of Heaven. Nor had he ever realized the moral nature of God had his sin been allowed to go on undetected and unreproved. It was no mere accident of circumstance that these ancient enemies came up against his kingdom. Behind all secondary causes, and the human motives which actuated their hostility, lay the permissive and controlling Will of God. These foes were His whip for the scourging of a rebellious land and its king.

It is frequently the case that only by stirring up strife against us can God reach the conscience which by reason of continued indulgence has lost its sensitiveness. Mere words are powerless to touch any one whose spiritual defection has proved materially profitable. There is prosperity which is a positive paralysis of spiritual sensibility ; and from this state God commonly seeks to rescue men by bringing disturbance to their serenity. Some of us would never seek Him at all were we not driven into a corner by circumstances we cannot control and enmities which we do not seem ourselves to have provoked. This is one interpretation, at least, of the seemingly causeless experiences of opposition into which we are from time to time brought, the real import of which we are often in danger of failing to realize.

Bid in the House of God six years.

THUS was Joash protected from the violence which sought to frustrate the ultimate purpose of God for His people. Had the seed royal been entirely destroyed by Athaliah a new dynasty would have been rendered inevitable, and the chain of God's progressive Providences broken. Hence there was Divine reason for the preservation of the young boy, under whom one of the greatest religious reformations of the land was subsequently carried out. It is something more than mere coincidence that he should have found sanctuary in one of the chambers of the House of God. Doubtless the influence of those hidden years played no inconsiderable part in preparing him for the life-work for which God designed him. In this impressionable period of his life he came to know God as a reality. The foundations of his faith were laid true and strong. He drank in unconscious inspiration for the brave service of later days. When the hour of God's ordination struck, he came forth fortified with unfailing confidence for the high tasks which awaited him, and which he carried through in the power of a living trust in the living God.

The hidden life is ever the preparation for active service. We must be learners before teachers, students before workers, saints before soldiers. In fellowship with the Lord we must learn by personal experience the power of the Gospel we are to proclaim, the magnitude of the task upon which we must embark, and the trustworthiness of the weapon we must wield in the conflict. Above all, our lives must be made worthy of the high entrustment of duty. This is the interpretation, to many, of the obscurity of their present days.

All the people shall keep the watch of the Lord.

JEHOIADA'S mind was set upon the establishment of God's worship and the contingent well-being of the nation. Hence at this critical time in its affairs he assumed command in order to secure the acceptance of Joash as king. Nor is it too much to say that in the hand of God he became the instrument by which evil was overthrown and the Divine goodwill accomplished. To each section of the people he assigned special duties in connection with the preservation of the young sovereign. Nothing was left to chance, nor to a merely general sense of responsibility. Special obligation was laid upon soldiers and priests who were to lead the people. But to all was committed the manifest duty of guarding Joash. He was, in a special sense, the care of each of his subjects. Unexpected circumstances might arise which Jehoiada's well-made plans could not foresee; and the whole body of the nation was to be a reserve force of watchfulness.

As the plans for Joash's safety and enthronement depended for ultimate success upon the fidelity of all the people, obscure as well as prominent, so in the affairs of the Kingdom of God. Responsibility rests upon all who profess Christ's allegiance. Upon their diligence depends much of the success of His enterprise. It is as they improve their opportunities for making Him known, watching for souls as those that must give account, that the work of the Kingdom is carried out. Indeed, if we but kept the watch of the Lord as carefully as we watch our own interests, what a different record we should have in the work of the Gospel.

Because ye have forsaken the Lord, He hath also forsaken you.

THE conspicuous characteristic of Zechariah the priest is his sublime courage. We know little about him but what this record tells—how that in days of national backsliding from God he boldly stood forth to rebuke the sin of the people, and to challenge them in the name of the Lord. Careless of danger to himself, he carried out the brave example of his father Jehoiada, and literally offered his life upon the service of his faith. For in such circumstances a man must be willing to seal his testimony with his blood. And this he did. With unerring instinct he laid the axe to the root of the tree, declaring that it was not Divine but human faithlessness which caused the present trouble in the land. God had forsaken Israel because Israel had forsaken Him. And he was at once a friend of the people and a prophet of God who ventured to declare the plain truth.

Such words are needed in every age—and such prophets. For God's nature is unchanged. While He never fails them that seek Him, it is likewise true that those who forsake Him are left to reap the fruit of their own doings. His help is not bestowed arbitrarily, nor without respect to the character of its recipients. If men choose to ignore or defy Him, they must learn the sinfulness of their sin by the withdrawal of His favour. Many a deplored calamity in national and individual life is traceable to this cause. Alas that too often, like Israel we visit His word upon His faithful messengers.

The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.

LIKE many another, Amaziah feared the personal cost of faithfulness to God. His alliance with the forces of Ephraim had involved him in heavy expenditure, and to break it off at the prophet's command could not but mean serious loss. Hence his hesitancy when confronted with the plain issue which the man of God declared. He wanted to do the right, but yet had a lurking desire, if possible, to recover the talents he had paid for Israel's assistance. To hearten him to courageous faith is this word given—that "the Lord is able to give thee much more than this." The benefit of His help against their foes is priceless beyond measure. For not only is He able to organize victory when they are hard-pressed, but He is able also in material things to enrich them with the fruits of victory far exceeding the cost of their fidelity to Him.

Many an one is hesitant when confronted with the claims of God, for just the same reason. It frequently seems as though we cannot respond to His demands, and receive the fulness of His blessing, apart from sacrificial cost. Indeed we must always be prepared to lose life's lower enrichments if we would gain the undying treasure of fellowship with Him. When such questions arise as: What about my business? How will my present plans be affected? Whence can I make up for the things lost?—we may always be assured of the truth of this word. God's "much more than this" goes far out beyond "all we can ask or think."

He was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

THIS is really the tragedy of the life of Uzziah. Beginning as a man of faith and consecrated energy, he went a long way toward sustaining the character of a true religious reformer. The secret of his success is explicitly declared in the fact that "he sought the Lord," Who helped him against numerous foes, and established him as their victorious conqueror. His prosperity, however, was his undoing; for it induced that perilous self-confidence which has been the forerunner of many another fall also. It blinded him to the true facts of the situation, so that he imagined himself to be strong. When he began to think of himself as competent to live without direct Divine reinforcements he was undone.

Herein is the failure of many a Christian life. Its morning is bright with promise and its noon-day with experience, but its evening is black with storm-clouds. Beginning with a deep sense of personal insufficiency we seek the help of God in things great and small alike. Nor does His fellowship fail us. But in the very success which it assures us lurks our greatest peril. For we are apt to become intoxicated at the sight of attainment and accomplishment, and to lose all sense of proportion. We imagine that somehow these gifts of God are indications of our own quality. We come to look upon them as expressions of human ascendancy rather than of Divine condescension. And as we thus become strong in our own eyes we become miserably weak. How pathetic is this record: "Marvellously helped until he was strong"; and then——?

Because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.

THE secret of Jotham's strength lay in the diligent preparedness of his life. He was not content to leave it at haphazard to the influence of changing moods and fluctuating fancy. He had discerned the inwardness of such a record as that of Amaziah, and its lesson had not been lost upon him. From the failure and decline of those who had begun well and yet had ended disastrously, he had laid hold of this truth—that everything in life depends upon maintaining right relationship to the Lord. So he diligently set himself to bring all his ways under the Divine survey and scrutiny. He determined that the governing consideration of his life should be His Will, and that nothing should find place in its programme which had not first passed His censorship. It was this subjugation of self-will to the control of God which made him a man of might. For God's demands are conveyances of Divine power to those who gladly embrace them.

Too often we fail in power because we fail in preparedness. We ask for Divine assistance without practically fulfilling the obligations of Divine allegiance. We seek strength apart from sanctification, the gifts of God without His government. And thus we come to disaster. For life is one related whole. We cannot separate the unseen from the seen, the personal from the public, the trivial from the important. God must be acknowledged, and His counsel sought in respect of everything, or otherwise we shall find unpreparedness to be the cause of ultimate downfall. One traitor within a citadel can open its gates to the enemy. One thing left to mere chance in any Christian life can eventually wreck it.

In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord.

AFFLICTION either softens or hardens men's hearts, according as they regard it a mere calamity or a courier of the Lord. Many an one has found his days of distress to be days of truest blessing since they drove him to the sure refuge of God's presence, there to find Him the Healer of his wounds, the Solver of his problems, the Lord of his life. On the other hand many have misconceived the mission of their afflictions, and with irritated spirit have turned from them to positive rebellion against God. Of this latter was Ahaz. Becoming restive under the Divine restraints, and misconceiving the Divine intention, he simply gave himself to further iniquities when under the chastening hand of God; and so made certain his own destruction. How different had been his history and that of the kingdom had his troubles but taken him to the Sanctuary!

This is the day of Divine grace, not of punishment. God's purpose in permitting affliction to touch His people is not punitive but disciplinary. When we do not heed the softer voices of love He makes us hearken to its harsher tones. When the gentle touch of His hand is unheeded we must be taught by its heavy pressure. All our blessedness depends upon recognizing Him in every such experience. If it drives us to His arms we are blessed indeed. But if, in rebellion and with stiff-neck, we plunge into positive sin as a distraction from the kindly chastening of the Lord, we are lost men,—beyond recovery.

2 CHRONICLES xxix. 27.

When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also.

THIS is something more than the record of a detail in Hezekiah's great dedication service. True, it recounts the simultaneous sacrifice by the priests, and outburst of praise by the people. Its importance, however, is in its spiritual significance, both to Israel and to us. For there is very definite connection between these two events. The burnt-offering signified the entire consecration of the nation to the Lord. It spoke of their dedication to His Will, and the completeness of their possession by Him. The victim upon the altar represented that living sacrifice which is the reasonable service of all His people. "The song of the Lord," which spontaneously broke from their lips when the smoke of the offering was seen ascending to Heaven, is the expression of that joy which comes alone from the assurance of its acceptance.

In our own Christian lives these two things are vitally connected. It is only when those who are truly Christ's become wholly His, by the entire surrender of themselves, their possessions, and their energies to His control, that joy unspeakable inspires them. Faith only becomes vocal when its consecration is vital. The believer who daily offers this sacrifice as his response to the mercies of God whereby he has been redeemed, can sing the Lord's song even though it be in this strange land of earth's opposition and difficulty. To this martial music he marches from the altar to the battlefield, already certain that he is more than conqueror through Him Who loved him.

Because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently.

THIS lack of fitness on the part of the priests is not only a record of enforced delay, but is of spiritual moment also, as indicating the necessity of personal holiness on the part of those who engage in any service of the Lord. What was ceremonial to them is actual to us, who, by virtue of the Precious Blood of the Lord Christ, are called to the spiritual priesthood. Under Hezekiah the sanctification of the priests consisted in certain abstinences, washings, and forms. Under Christ, our Great High Priest, it consists of separation from evil and of dedication unto God on its human side, and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the Divine side. Both then and now only those are qualified to offer spiritual sacrifices who are themselves partakers of the grace of God.

How many Christians there are who, like these priests, are unuseable because unsanctified! While on every hand opportunity calls for the devotion of their energies, they are unfitted to lay hold of it. Impoverished spiritual life—always traceable to insufficient surrender and imperfect faith—is the real cause of all uselessness on the part of those who ought to be busily engaged in the work of the Lord. Many a cause languishes to-day, and many a Church is practically dead as far as its influence upon the unconverted world goes, because the priests are not “vessels unto honour sanctified and meet for the Master’s use.” Holiness—in energetic purpose of heart, at least—is the one certain condition of spiritual effectiveness.

Unto every one that entereth into the house of the Lord, his daily portion for their service.

NO man is called to do any service for God apart from covenanted spiritual enduement. With every commission, whether the task be great or small, God imparts just that peculiar grace which its faithful accomplishment demands. Such is the inwardness of this record. All who had anything to do in regard to the Temple services received their daily portion, which was ministered to them by Divine command, and varied according to the manner of their service. And this arrangement which made possible the service of God's House to all who were called thereto, likewise took away every ground of excuse from those who neglected or only imperfectly performed it.

It is not without significant meaning to us that the portion of these workers was a daily one. We are all apt to forget that the grace of yesterday came to an end with yesterday's toil. Many an one is seeking to carry out to-day's duties in the power of an already exhausted experience. Too often we live and work on a mere memory of blessing which has long since ceased to be dynamic. Many a man has become an empty echo of his own former self simply because he has presumed to live upon some past experience. Whereas each day and each duty is provided for in the Covenant of the Lord. His grace is sufficient for us, but only a day at a time. Let us not fail to bear in mind that He never expects us to labour at our own charges.

God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.

THE tests of a godly man are always instructive. In the hey-day of his prosperity, and when obedience to the declared Will of God had become habitual to Hezekiah, God put his faith and loyalty to trial. It was not that God was Himself ignorant of the real state of the king's heart. Nor could anything be disclosed to Him by a change of circumstance of which He was not already aware. It was Hezekiah who did not really know himself ; and it was toward the creation of a sanctifying self-knowledge that the test of the Babylonian ambassadors was permitted. " God left him " in the sense that He did not force him by any constraint to a predetermined course. To his own fealty and sincerity was left the application of faith's principles. How he failed, in making display of God's gifts as if they had been his own wealth, and how he suffered loss in consequence, is part of the vivid history of his reign.

It is by no means an uncommon experience on the part of Christians that God permits them to come into circumstances which tests the very foundations of their being. Having confessed the principles of the Kingdom as the governing rule of life, the Lord allows them widest liberty in their conscientious application to the changing affairs of life. We are not automata but living men, blessed with the power of making choice between the higher and the lower when these alternative issues challenge us. But only as we cultivate intimate fellowship with Christ Himself, which reinforces our every instinct and will, are we likely to be found faithful under test.

When he was in affliction he besought the Lord.

MANASSEH stands out prominently amongst the kings of Judah for an experience of necessity and prayer which changed his whole life. Overcome by the Syrians, and carried away into captivity to Babylon, he there learned how to seek the God Whom hitherto he had ignored, and even flouted. Like many another, when brought low and made to realize his true state, he then turned to ask favour at God's hands. And like many another, too, he found it! For the love of God to penitent prodigals does not begin with the New Testament, but is as old as His nature. Thus Manasseh was brought back from Babylon to his own land in answer to prayer. The reality of his experience of God was subsequently attested in the reformation of which he was the active instrument, and in the purging of the nation from its idolatrous practices. He showed his faith by his works.

Were it not for the spur of affliction it is doubtful if some of us would ever be aroused to prayer. When all goes well, and prosperity attends our efforts, God is too often left out of account and His claims are disregarded. Were we suffered thus to go on undisturbed, great would be our calamity. It is the love of God, however, which brings us into circumstances where we realize that we cannot do without Him, and where we remember the glad fact that we need not. Well it is for us that His faithfulness in answering the cry of His people is entirely independent of their moral worthiness. It is ever our need, and not our perfections, which commends us to the tender mercies of the Lord.

And the men did the work faithfully.

THIS is the honourable record of the army of artificers and builders who, under Josiah, were set to the work of repairing the House of the Lord. Individually anonymous, they yet stand out for all time as an inspiring example to all those to whom life means duty. It cannot but be that their faithfulness was the outcome of personal recognition on the part of each one that his work was for God. For it is always a great faith which inspires great faithfulness. Nothing secures men so effectually from the ever-present peril of adopting lower and unworthier standards of service as the consciousness that God's eye is upon them. Others may satisfy themselves with a mere perfunctory carrying-out of what is committed to them, measuring up to the letter of the commandment. But he who really believes in God accounts his best as altogether insufficient, and looks upon anything less than this as not even moral.

In the Kingdom of God that man is of most service upon whom He can most entirely depend. It is not the showy qualities of brilliance and conspicuous ability which mark any out as being the most effective workers ; and it is always to the faithful servant that the Crown of Life is promised. And let us bear in mind that that faithfulness is a grace best seen in regard to small things. Any one can carry out a matter of large moment with diligence and fidelity, especially when the eyes of all men are turned upon him. But it takes real devotion to Christ to be faithful in the tiniest details of His commands with no other stimulus than the certainty of His approval.

Forbear thee from meddling with God.

NO stranger incident in Israel's history is recorded than this concerning the end of Josiah. It would almost seem as though the prosperity and blessing which had attended his early faithfulness to God had been too much for him. Under any other circumstances it is difficult to find explanation of his desire, as a man of God, to fight against one with whom he had no quarrel, and who was avowedly well-intentioned toward him. Necho, the king of Egypt, knowing Josiah's confessed faith in God, did his utmost to restrain him from this ill-advised course; and gives him, hence, this striking advice. In his head-strong pride, however, he would not forbear to meddle with God, and, apparently without seeking any counsel of Him, went disguised into the battle, only to meet his death. Thus do even good men cut short their usefulness in the service of God by going beyond His commandment, and by taking their lives into their own hands—and out of His.

We are wise when we lay this word to heart, for much of our weakness comes from this very thing—"meddling with God." We are apt to grow impatient at the slowness of His methods, His seeming disregard of our concerns, His inactivity on our behalf; forgetting that His is ever the way of perfect wisdom and love. Sometimes it is with the endeavour of helping His plans to speedier fruition that we take upon ourselves the responsibility of impetuous action. Indeed meddling with God covers a wide range of fleshly activity, which we do well to avoid as we value our souls.

Till there was no remedy.

THIS last record of all reveals in vivid contrast Israel's determined transgression and God's infinite patience. Despite the many messengers He sent to them, with overtures of mercy and promises of deliverance, they refused His control and wedded themselves yet more closely to evil courses ; until, at last, it would seem as though every Divine resource was exhausted. The people who treated all His gifts with contumely must be left to reap the fruit of their own evil. God can do nothing—short of taking away their power of will, to recreate a nation which deliberately flouts His authority. So the last hour of Israel's existence as a nation strikes. Henceforward for years to come they are to be exiles in a strange land. The iron has to enter into their souls. The bitter consequence of their own stubbornness has to be brought home to them. Refusing to shed the tears of repentance they are to weep many tears of remorse. In the furnace of pain and suffering the dross has to be burned out of them, ere they are brought back to the land they have forfeited by their sin. They have chosen the way of transgressors, and are to find it harder than they dreamed.

As with Israel so with individuals who despise the Lord, and who, despite every rebuke, continue to reject His Son—the incarnation of His message of love and life. For there is no remedy for human sin beyond that which He declares and offers. The only alternative is captivity, darkness, and death. What blind fools we are to turn from Him when the issues are so arrestingly plain.

EZRA i. i.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.

NOTHING seemed more unlikely than that the exile of His people should be terminated by such a movement on God's part. The influencing of a heathen king toward the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem could never have entered into the wildest dreams of the banished race. And yet it was this unlikely thing that happened. Apparently without any external circumstances to account for the creation of his interest, Cyrus was directly moved by the Spirit of God. Under this constraint he issued the proclamation which freed the people of God to return to their own land, and at the same time secured for them all the material assistance needed for the rebuilding of His House. Nothing is more striking in their history than this direct intervention of God by the use of a man who could not be regarded as having any natural sympathy with His cause.

God's use of unlikely instruments is one of the facts of the Christian life which at once challenges and confirms the faith of His servants. Confronted as they are with tasks entirely beyond the reach of their own resources, they are compelled to look to Him alone to open closed doors and beat down strong opposition. And this is the history of many an enterprise of the Kingdom, and in particular of its missionary extension. For He is the God of all power, and holds the key of every situation. Nothing so effectually strengthens the faith of His people as thus to see Him working on their behalf in a manner which leaves no doubt as to the identity of the worker.

They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work.

WHEN it is remembered that such possessions as the people had were saved and accumulated in years of captivity, this record of their generosity has a new value. For it evidences the reality of their devotion to God's House, that they should so gladly contribute their possessions to its rebuilding. None of them could have been rich, yet each had something for the Lord's treasury ; and not by the gifts of a few, but by the offerings of all was the desired end accomplished. The ability of each constituted his responsibility, for God does not expect what a man has not. And each gift gave the giver a sense of personal share in the Temple which nothing else could have done. It was theirs as well as His ; nor were they likely to neglect its services when they had made personal sacrifices for its erection.

It is not too much to say that richer far than the gifts which came by the generosity of Cyrus and his successors were these gains of adversity which the people themselves contributed. And so it ever is in regard to the work of God. Many gifts have spiritual worth altogether out of proportion to their monetary value. When His people acquire, in the furnace of affliction, the treasure of moral character which they devote to the work of the Kingdom, this is in the sight of God of great price. Many, too, who cannot give gold are thus able to give what gold can never purchase. These are the richest offerings which the treasure of His work ever receives.

Then stood up Jeshua . . . and builded the altar of the God of Israel.

IT is most significant that this was the first act of the returned exiles. Long before the work of rebuilding the Temple was taken in hand, the Altar of the Lord was erected and the sacrifice offered. This was not only due to the fact that whereas the altar could be erected in a day the completion of the Temple took years. It is also a testimony to the instinct of the returned people. They might exist without the elaborate Temple ritual—precious though that was to them on account of its Divine ordinance and spiritual meaning ; but they could not live apart from the propitiatory sacrifice. Within their hearts was at once the sense of sin and of joy, which could only find adequate expression in sin-offering and burnt-offering. And it was as those who were assured of their pardon and acceptance that they set about, and finally accomplished, the building of God's House.

That for which the Altar stands in the Christian economy is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It must be planted right in the centre of all our thinking and planning if our hearts are to know any peace and our work is to have any value. All true spiritual experience begins here. By personal appropriation of His sacrificial death, life becomes ours ; and all energy for service is thence derived. The observance of this order—the Altar first and then the building of the Temple is entirely necessary. It is the disregard of this which is the cause of so much weakness in the professing Church to-day.

Let us build with you : for we seek your God, as ye do.

THUS did the adversaries try to join themselves to the people of God in order to frustrate their work. Aroused and alarmed at its evident progress, they were determined to obstruct it, and imagined that the surest way to accomplish their end was to feign sympathy. Thwarted in their purpose by the splendid courage of Zerubbabel and those with him, who declared : " Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God," their professed friendship soon threw off its mask, and they became avowed enemies who endeavoured to weaken the hands of the people by open opposition. More cunningly also, they addressed false accusations against them to the king of Persia, and even succeeded for a time by this means in bringing the work to a standstill. Thus do the enemies of the Lord reveal themselves, as in Ezra's day, so in our own.

The world is always ready to proffer its help in God's work, and too often its advances are accepted. Once, however, the spirit of the world has been admitted into any Christian enterprise, it soon dominates it to the overthrow of its original spiritual purpose. The Church of Christ never makes so great and tragic a mistake as when it welcomes the assistance of those who are not of its membership by the New Birth. This, indeed, is the explanation of a large part of the ineffectiveness of much Christian work to-day. Let God's people resist the world however, and its opposition will speedily declare itself, and may even, for a time, seem successful. Ultimately, however, the weapons of our warfare must prove mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, and to the upbuilding of the Cause committed to our faithfulness.

The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews.

IT was this sense of the Divine oversight which preserved the courage of the Jews when challenged by Tatnai. Under the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah their zeal in regard to the Temple, which had somewhat died down under the compulsion of the king of Persia, revived. With re-kindled energy the great task had been recommenced, only to call forth fresh enmity and opposition. Influential as this was, it could not, however, damp the ardour of the people of God, since they realized that His eye was upon them. The knowledge of His concern in respect of their individual action made each man fearless, and helped him to be master of his own soul in circumstances which might well have excused a feeble withdrawal from the sacred enterprise. So long as the Jews were able to preserve this realization that God's eye was upon them they were invincible.

We often fall before the onslaught of our enemies because we forget what is the representative nature of our service. We stand before the world as bearing the commission of God Himself. It is at His command that we labour in His cause. His is the plan for the whole work, and for that of each individual worker. Hence our foes are His. It is at His Kingdom they aim. Their intent is to frustrate His purposes of grace. And in the issue He depends upon our fidelity. This is surely inspiration enough for the feeblest. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

And that which they have need of . . . let it be given them day by day without fail.

GOD had turned the counsel of his foes to foolishness. Their appeal to the king of Persia had resulted, not, as they had hoped, in the overthrow of the Temple-builders, but had secured to them the royal patronage. Now under his command those who had tried to hinder the work were compelled to contribute to it. Part of the taxes which they paid to the Persian kingdom was henceforth to be devoted to the Temple, for the king had construed the decree of his predecessor as being his own responsibility. Thus were the enemies of the Lord confounded and His work forwarded. The completeness of the provision made for His people left nothing to be desired. Their every need, both for their own support and for the furnishing of God's House, was guaranteed.

All this is not an unworthy picture—though necessarily incomplete, of the provision which God makes for those who in this our own day are devoted to His work. The promise runs—"All your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"; and as with the Temple-builders so it is fulfilled to us "day by day without fail." On this account none of us is without excuse if we are found negligent in His service. The amplitude of our resources for ever condemns all slackness and half-heartedness in the carrying out of our responsibility. We are not paupers but princes, and as such are competent for every task to which His Will commissions us. When we make His service our delight, our wants are surely His care.

Perfect peace, and at such a time.

THE salutation of Artaxerxes in his letter to Ezra is an expression of the faith which he had learned through the influence of those of the exiled people who, in their captivity, maintained the worship of God. For it was not a mere form of benevolent address, such as any one of that day might have used, but rather was in the nature of a benediction. It was a reminder of the protection of the Lord God, which was the ultimate security of His people. It declared that even "at such a time" His promise was full of meaning to those whose mind was truly stayed upon Him. All that follows in the royal rescript is but an expansion of this opening word.

Thus is anticipated in the Old Testament the blessing of the New. For it is in Christ alone that perfect peace is realizable in every adverse circumstance. While He declared that in the world His disciples must expect to have tribulation, He also covenanted that in Him they should have peace. The unknown future holds no terrors therefore for those who recognize that He is closer to us than all opposition, and that no shaft of the enemy can hit us which has not first passed through the protective medium of His permissive Will. There are times in the life of us all when everything seems to be contradictory of peace, and when it is impossible to forget our anxieties even for an hour. How satisfying is the Evangel which declares the certainty of "perfect peace at such a time." For this helpful lesson comes to us all from this word, notwithstanding the alteration for the sake of greater precision which the Revised Version adopts.

The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.

THIS is Ezra's reason for not requiring of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help him against the enemy in the way. He had made public confession of his faith in God, confidently declaring that He would be the Defender of His people. To go now, when opposition threatened and difficulty was imminent, with a request for the king's assistance, would be a denial of Him and an entire contradiction of his own profession. Convinced that the task committed to him accorded with the Will of God, and assured in his own heart of the purity of his motive, he did not fail to trust God for everything. So long as His hand was upon him for good, no foe could menace his well-being nor destroy his peace.

Herein is the confidence of all who undertake any work for God in a world full of opposition. The enemy most certainly assails all who seriously threaten his interests. No true worker is ever immune from attack. Depend upon it, if the work is worth disturbing it will be disturbed. Yet is there no need for panic ; for the Lord is on the side of the man who sides with Him. Quiet confidence in His protection will at all times carry His servants through to victory. On the other hand, to enlist the help of the world is at once a weakening of the Cause and a certain means of bringing the Lord's Name into dishonour—as though He could not defend those whom He sends forth to do His bidding. And once the world's assistance is sought all spiritual independence is forfeited and the Kingdom impoverished.

Because of the transgression of those that had been carried away.

HOW frequently is the glory of God beclouded in its brightest hour by human sinfulness. Ezra's rejoicing at being permitted to complete the building of the Temple had not ceased ere tidings of the waywardness of the people brought him to sorrow. In defiance of God's commandment, mixed marriages had been contracted with the surrounding nations and had led to grievous moral disorder. No more moving event is recorded of this period than the prophet's shame and contrition at such a state of things. That the Lord's honour should have been dragged in the mire is the cause of deepest pain to him ; and it is as a heart-broken man that He seeks mercy from God. For he has dwelt long enough in the secret place of the Most High to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and how its consequence is to halt the work of the Kingdom.

It is an apt word which describes the people as having been " carried away " by their transgressions. Seductive temptations had robbed them of judgment. As with a flood passion had swept them off their feet. The old moorings of faith and obedience had given way. The people of God, to whom this wonderful renewal of opportunity had been granted, had become victims of evil and destructive forces. How true a picture of sin is this ! Men begin to yield to its advances little by little, only to find themselves caught up in its deadly embrace and carried away from all that has hitherto made life in any degree worthy. Wherefore let us beware of the beginnings of wrongdoing.

Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

UNDER the burning shame of the prophet a conviction of sin took hold of the people, while the remembrance of God's former goodness quickened in them the moral purpose of repentance and return. With the keen vision which is ever granted to those who begin to seek Him, they realized at what cost renewal could alone be brought about. The unholy alliances must be broken. Ties which had been formed in the flesh must be dissevered. No consideration of personal convenience can be allowed to weigh against the necessity of drastic reformation. They must bring forth fruit meet for repentance. And for this they were made willing. With one consent they came together prepared to break off these condemned relationships. Thus was justified this kindling of hope.

God is always ready to meet men more than halfway. When under the constraint of His Spirit sin has been discovered, and we are willing utterly to relinquish it, we have sure and certain hope of acceptance and forgiveness based upon the fact of God's own nature. Indeed, the greatness of any sin is in persistent refusal to repent and turn from it. But let it never be thought that the restoration of an individual or of a nation which has sinned grievously against God is an easy matter. Christ has said that an offending right hand must be cut off, and an offending right eye must be plucked out. Renunciation, even though it involves pain and blood, is the only pathway into the sunshine for those who have given themselves to sinful courses in the dark.

For I was the king's cupbearer.

IT was thus owing to his position of nearness to the king that Nehemiah was able to plead the cause of his nation. His freedom of access and speech gave him the opportunity of bringing the desire of the Jews for return to Jerusalem, and for the rebuilding of the City, before the king's notice, and of enlisting also his sympathy and help. Herein is seen the work of God Who placed His servant in that position of privilege ; and Who at the same time moved the heart of the heathen sovereign, so that he was willing both to liberate the people and to further their desire for His glory. The whole matter was from first to last Divinely planned and executed. Even though the nation was suffering exile in just punishment of sin, His heart was still toward His people. And silently He wrought, by devious ways and through various instruments, for their deliverance and ultimate good.

Nehemiah realized that his position, with the possibilities it opened up to him, was an opportunity for furthering God's cause ; and he used it as such. It was no mere matter of accident that he found himself an officer of the royal household. Nor was it simply as a means of livelihood that this work had come to his hand. It was God's arrangement for the bringing about of His own Will ; and so he regarded and employed it. This is the secret of blessing in the life of every believer. Our secular circumstances are His concerns. He has set us where we are in order that we may serve the interests of His Kingdom. Our every necessary contact with the world should be a place of witness. There is strategic value in the appointment and service of even the least of His people.

Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart.

FEW pictures in the Old Testament are more vivid than that of Nehemiah's midnight ride round the broken walls of Jerusalem. Confident that the impulse to rebuild the city was a Divine inspiration, he confers not with "flesh and blood," but sets about a review of the task, in the certainty that his help is not in man at all. Had he taken others into counsel it is likely that the work had never been accomplished; for to human eye it could appear nothing but a hopeless impossibility. Nehemiah, however, does not require any confirmation of the plan which has come to him in such a direct manner from God. So he seeks to inspire his compatriots by example, rather than to convince them by counsel. The success of his God-honouring method is the theme of this entire record.

It is ever thus that work for God is most surely accomplished. When He puts a burden upon any one of His servants it is that he may go forward with courage—and single-handed if need be. Spiritual leadership is the privilege of the man who dares to stand alone, and who is unmoved in the strength of his conviction that God has spoken to him concerning the work he undertakes. Such an one will ever gather kindred spirits to him. The enthusiasm of his faith cannot but communicate itself to others, to whom merely calculated counsel would reveal deterring difficulties. Let no man, therefore, fear to go forward into whose heart God puts a purpose of service. He will be vindicated as he goes.

Their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.

THIS is the abiding condemnation of the Tekoites. They certainly engaged in the work of building the wall, but not with their whole hearts. Their entire strength was not given to the service. Behind their service was no passion. They lacked the dynamic of strong faith in God. Hence their easefulness in such strenuous days. Others might labour with every diligence, spending themselves to the utmost in this sacred enterprise; but not so the Tekoites. The cause was by no means dear enough to them to call forth anything like their full strength. It had not secured their entire energy because the God of Israel had not captured their entire heart.

These men have no small band of successors in our own day. There are to be found in every Church and community those who, while professedly Christian, and while announcing their sympathy with the work of the Lord, do not bow their necks to Christ's yoke. Their total contribution to the effort of the Gospel is practically nil. For their real god is ease, pleasure, worldly good. Of sacrifice, or of risking themselves in any way for the furtherance of the Kingdom of Heaven, they know nothing. Gladly do they muster for parade, but always are they missing on the field of battle. Their heart's interest is simply not in Christ. And though they profess faith in Him, it is more than doubtful if they are not among those whom He never knew. For, in the final analysis, only that faith in Him which will not be denied full expression in service is owned of Him.

Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord.

THE difficulties encountered by Nehemiah are in themselves a fruitful study, for they range from the insinuating advances of those who would make alliance with him only to compass the failure of the work, to the open and avowed enmity of the angered nobles, whose threats alarmed the simpler folk of his company. Never did his courage shine more brightly than when their enmity was at its height, and seemed likely to succeed. For he saw beyond them to the God Who had commissioned him. Their angry words could not drown His voice of inward assurance. He was never for a moment in dread of them, because he was never for a moment in doubt of God. Thus it is that he heartens his fellow-workers on this wise.

If we but remembered the Lord, according to Nehemiah's injunction, how insignificant would appear the difficulties with which the path of Christian service is beset. It is, however, part of the device of the Enemy so to confuse our minds as to obscure for the time the great facts of God's faithfulness. And he often succeeds. Hence we concentrate our thought upon problems and situations, instead of giving ourselves to prayer and betaking us to the Sanctuary. For ready help is always available there. *There* our inspiration to build and to battle is certain of renewal. *There* in the fellowship of Christ we come to partake of something of His own heroism. "Remember the Lord" is the quickening motto of each one in the ranks of His Crusade.

Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God ?

THIS is Nehemiah's unanswerable challenge to those who, by their methods of usury, had brought their fellow-Jews into bondage, broken the unity of the common fellowship, and given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. It is upon the last-named of these effects of their unrighteous conduct that Nehemiah bases his reproach. For to him God's honour is of paramount importance. No other consideration contests with this the jealous devotion of his life. And all his efforts are directed to the creation of this same consciousness among the people. His desire is that the whole nation shall be worthy of its high calling. Hence his rebuke to the nobles and rulers who were at fault in this matter.

Forgetfulness of the fact that to each believer is committed in some degree the honour of the Lord, is at the root of all inconsistent conduct. Many of us are wrongly centred. We think and plan for ourselves, often without regard for anything outside our own personal interests. We order our doings, social and commercial, with reference to nothing but their effect upon our material interests. Hence it is that frequently the world is able to point the finger of scorn at the professed people of God, because of some glaring outrage upon commonly accepted standards of right and wrong. And, whenever this happens, Christ is wounded afresh in the house of His friends. The sense of binding obligation is one we need carefully to foster. For when a man says in his heart, "I ought," it is no far step to the determination "I can and will."

I am doing a great work . . . I cannot come down.

THE plot of Tobiah and Sanballat failed at its outset. For they had not reckoned upon the steadfastness of the man with whom they had to deal. Their purpose was to attract him from the work in hand, on the specious plea of conferring together for its readier achievement. But their temptation found Nehemiah in touch with God, and so able to discern between the true and the false. His answer expresses a healthy contempt of their subterfuge—the attitude of a man who is perfectly sure of his ground. God has given him a commission; nor is it likely that He will either revoke or amend it by the counsel of such men as they. Nehemiah's "cannot come down" simply means "WILL NOT."

It is well to be absorbed in the Lord's work when we really know it to be HIS. Indeed, we should be saved from many foolish counsels were we too busily engaged in the thing which has been committed to us as a personal responsibility, to find time or inclination for academic discussion concerning it with those who are merely onlookers. For Sanballat has many modern followers, who do not put their hands to the work of building Zion's walls but who are yet ever ready to talk about it! Many an earnest worker, indeed, has been betrayed into becoming little more than a discussionist, while the work on which he should be engaged languishes. And the enemy's objective is surely attained, when on any pretext believers are persuaded to leave the wall. Arguments lost or won count literally for nothing when they mean duty forsaken and work undone.

He was a faithful man, and feared God above many.

LITTLE is known of Hanani, the ruler of the palace, beyond this record. And yet little more needs to be known, for nothing can be added to such a tribute. It is not to be wondered at that Nehemiah's choice as a governor for Jerusalem should fall on such an one. For these are the essential qualifications for all responsible service—faithfulness and the fear of God. Other men may be brilliant, the possessors of gifts which single them out for public notice ; but in the end of the day, it is the man who is content to be faithful to that with which he is entrusted, and whose standards of personal conduct are such as enable him at all times to stand in the presence of God, who is a really dependable and trustworthy servant. It is of such indeed that Christ Himself declares the certainty of eternal reward.

Strength and sensitiveness are the twin qualities of a really great soul. It is the man who fears God much who is at all times free from debilitating fear of man. He can stand unmoved before opposition and threat, because he bows in reverence and subjection before the God of Heaven. His integrity explains his independence. He finds it easy to make great refusals because of his great acceptance of the Divine government. He is an incurable optimist, because he knows that to stand with God, even though he should stand alone, is to be on the side of certain victory. A race of such men is the world's greatest need to-day. For all the powers of Heaven are ready to cooperate with the man who is faithful—if need be unto death.

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

IT is significant that this oft-quoted word of encouragement is closely connected with the exhortation to unselfish remembrance of others. In the day of the Great Feast, when there was fat to be eaten and sweet to be drunk, the people are reminded to send portions to them for whom nothing was prepared. Their own rich enjoyment must be hallowed by being shared with the less fortunate. Only as they thus bore themselves in that great day of rejoicing could they lose their consciousness of self-merited condemnation in the assurance of Divine favour and goodness. And this joy would become positive strength to them. On its wings they should mount up above every memory of the past and every difficulty of the present. To its song they should march as an army terrible with banners. In the confidence it strengthens they should undertake every task which challenged their loyalty.

Christian joy is a by-product of faith and obedience. It is something more than mere happiness, which after all depends largely upon what happens. It is the soul's confidence in the faithfulness and wisdom of God. Often too deep for song, it is nevertheless an enduement for the serious duty of living. For round about us is a joyless world whose laughter is for the most part hollow, and its songs but forced mirth. Within the heart of him who has the certainty of God's pardoning grace, His keeping-power, His watchful providence, and His entirely sufficient provision, is a well-spring of satisfaction, in completest contrast to the poor delights whose failure is the world's constant grief. For it knows neither ebb nor flow.

A God ready to pardon.

COULD there be an attribute of God more certainly calculated to bring comfort to sin-troubled hearts ? For the first instinct of the awakened soul is its need of forgiveness. However the consciousness of personal sin is brought home to any, it is always as a guilty offence against a just law. There is a moral stain on the conscience also. But this is not the soul's first concern. In its self-condemnation the heart of man cries out for assured pardon and reconciliation, nor does it know peace until this is realized. Hence the joy of such a certainty as this, that it is of God's nature that He is ever ready to pardon. No mere reprieve on promise of amendment can ever satisfy the one who is awakened to his true state, and aroused to flee from the wrath to come. Nothing less than the pardoning voice of God can allay his fears and reassure his confidence.

It is this voice which sounds in Christ. He is God's full and final word of pardon to undone men. In Him we see the depth to which the Divine forgiveness reaches, and the length to which the Divine love goes, in the redemption of the sinful. And in Him, God's readiness to pardon the penitent is seen *in excelsis*. For is not His word, " Him that cometh unto ME I will in no wise cast out," a warrant which forbids our fears, and reassures our self-condemnation ? And does not His story of the father who saw the returning prodigal when he was yet a great way off, and who stifled the son's self-accusation and confession by the kiss of peace, encourage us in our darkest hour to rely upon the pardoning readiness of God ?

We made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly . . . for the service of the house of our God.

UNDER Nehemiah the people were in earnest about the re-establishment of the worship of God in the rebuilt city and Temple. The whole world was looking on at the spectacle of a nation redeemed and restored ; and hence it was incumbent upon them to keep the lamp of worship brightly burning. For upon the purity of their worship depended the clarity of their witness. On this account they did not leave the support of the ministry and the upkeep of the Temple services to any mere haphazard impulse of generosity. They bound themselves in a voluntary ordinance to devote a definite part of their possessions to this purpose. The necessities of God's House became the first charge upon the income of each one, as part of his personal consecration.

We are all apt to be less business-like in our financial dealings with God than with men. These latter we order with care and watch with keenness, knowing well that in a world of competition nothing less is adequate to the situation. The former, however, we too often leave entirely unordered. We give spasmodically, as our emotions may be touched and our sympathies kindled from time to time. And yet how regular and unfailing is His ministry to our needs which sets up our obligation toward Him ! Did we but recognize this, we should make the devotion of our gifts to His work the most regular of all our arrangements. It is with such sacrifice that He is well pleased, and His cause well maintained.

The thanksgiving in prayer.

IT was the distinction of Mattaniah that he "was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer." That is, he led the chorus of the people in a great national act of praise. This fact however, in itself, would not be sufficiently noteworthy to give him place in this immortal record. Its real significance lies in the character of the service he rendered. Never before do we hear of "the thanksgiving in prayer." Hitherto prayer has been supplication and intercession—the seeking of gifts from God and the proffering of requests. Now, however, we have distinct advance in the note struck by Mattaniah, who combines thanksgiving with petition. It is as though he is the first of Old Testament worthies to anticipate the prayer clause of the New Covenant: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Herein he is an example to us who live in the full light of these more brightly-illuminated days. For too often our intercourse with God is restricted to making requests of Him. We are all prone to forget that prayer should be mingled with the perfume of praise. Indeed, the native selfishness of our hearts never so clearly expresses itself as in the forms of our address to the Lord. And, short-sightedly, we miss His richest blessings in consequence. It is the man who feathers the arrows of his petitions with gratitude and thanksgiving whose prayers carry furthest. Thanksgiving in prayer is one secret of prevailing.

The joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

HEREIN is recorded the great dedication of the nation's completed task. The wall being now completed, Nehemiah made most elaborate preparations for its ceremonial presentation to God as an expression of the consecration of the people. By faith and obedience the Divine commission had been carried out. The opposition and enmity of those who sought to thwart the work and hinder its progress had been despised, as only they whose assurance is in the faithfulness of God can despise His foes. Intrigue and plot had failed ; and it is as a victorious company that they now stand before the Lord, dedicating to Him that which they have wrought at His word. The joy that filled their hearts and tuned their songs was the consciousness of His good pleasure.

Nothing is more forceful in the whole scale of Christian witness than the sweet melody of joy. Its strains carry further than all others, and at once arrest the attention and arouse the interest of those who hear them. They are the music of the Gospel which lead many Home through the darkness. But they can never be forced. For joy is a by-product of faith and obedience. It is the fruit of the Spirit in the life of that believer whose whole energy is directed toward the doing of God's Will. This is the secret of spiritual effluence, by which those who are afar off become partakers of heavenly blessing through redeemed lives. For such joy, utterly independent of earth's fluctuating fortunes, has a convincing power which simply defies measure.

Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy.

IT is full of meaning that Nehemiah should interject this prayer for mercy in the midst of his recital before God of the things which he has accomplished in His Name. Not only has the wall of the city been built according to commandment, but abuses and excesses among the people have been checked with holy sternness. He has spared none in his energetic endeavour to make the city worthy of God's sanctifying Presence. Single-handed he has purged out many of the things that offended, and has punished those who disobeyed and set themselves against God's Will. And yet, as he recounts these things, he casts himself upon the mercy of God. He realizes that it is not by his own deeds that He is commended to Him. His obedience, great as it has been, has altogether fallen below the Divine standard and requirement. The very elevation of His ideals protects him from foolish self-glory ; and never does he stand before us so obviously a great man as when he thus pleads the mercy of God in the hour of his triumph.

It is by the Spirit of Christ that we learn, even when we have done those things which were commanded us, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants. However zealous and strenuous our endeavours, and however self-sacrificing our service, these constitute no ground for acceptance and assurance. We never get beyond our need of the infinite mercy of God, which pardons our faults and forgives our shortcomings. It is, in truth, of His mercy that we are not consumed.

The vessels being diverse one from another.

THIS is but a mere detail in the account of an oriental feast almost unparalleled in its lavish luxury. So affluent was the display of wealth in this orgy of sensuous indulgence that even no two vessels were alike. Such was the abundance of gold and silver. And yet, since no fragment of the Divine record is void of spiritual teaching and meaning, we may take this one as expressive of a vital principle of life. For all man's ingenuity in reckless expenditure only results in a poor and pitiable imitation of the Divine. There is, for instance, no leaf in the forest which is not unique in form. There is no blade of grass in the field which is quite like any other one. One star differeth from another star. God has invested every item of His creation with individual character and worth.

So, too, it is in grace. The glory of every life is in its uniqueness. Under the guidance and discipline of the Spirit of God every believer becomes "a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use." But be it remembered, that even so, each one differs from his neighbour. Unity of purpose does not connote uniformity, either of character or activity. Every man in Christ has his individual count in the values of the Kingdom. How foolish, then, it is for Christians to be envious one of the other, or to despise one another with an affectation of superiority! God has made the vessels of His House diverse for His own glory. In such a great house as His, there are vessels of gold and silver. And there are some also of wood and of earth.

So Esther was taken unto king Abasuerus into his house.

THE story of the fall of Vashti and the elevation of Esther, the unknown Jewish maiden, to the royal throne, is one of the romances of Old Testament history. Clad in vivid oriental imagery, the story stands out with startling clearness as an illustration of the Divine overruling of human affairs, which in themselves seem to be entirely unrelated to the things of the Kingdom of God. The caprice of an unbridled potentate, and his dismissal of a queen who revolted against his imperious will, was used of God for the furtherance of the well-being of His own people, and ultimately, through them, to the blessing of the world, of which blessing they have been the unconscious and unworthy channel. Even when He seems to be least active He is most at work. Behind earth's thrones and dominions moves the creative and permissive Will of Him Who inhabiteth Eternity.

Esther's elevation is but one instance of many in the Sacred Scriptures of God's exaltation of humble folk to do great work for Him. He calls Samuel, a mere boy in the temple, to be His prophet. He chooses David from among the sheepfolds to govern Israel. He takes up an obscure man like Gideon to be the deliverer of his race, and a herdman like Amos to declare His word in circumstances of peculiar urgency. Indeed, if believers will be but small enough in their own eyes, and low enough in their own self-esteem, there can never be any question as to the Lord making use of them to fulfil His purposes.

Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

IT sometimes happens that loyalty to a higher law involves disrespect of a lower. Mordecai refused to bow the knee to Haman because to have done so would have been tacit approval of a character for which he could have no moral respect. As one who sought the highest interest of his nation, he realized himself to be in some way bound up with its destiny; and it was necessarily his first concern to keep in touch with God. He was content therefore to be looked upon and dealt with as a transgressor of the king's command, because, as a matter of fact, his life was ruled by a standard altogether different from that which obtained amongst those who challenged him.

There are occasions in life when faithfulness to God involves His people in utter disregard of conventions which lack moral sanction. Only by sheer independence of judgment and action is it possible to maintain the integrity of one's faith and witness in the various crises of choice which are from time to time forced upon us. It is an easy thing to go with the multitude, and to do as others do, without any reference to God's law and claims. If to be popular is life's ideal, the surest course by which it may be realized is to take the line of least resistance. If, on the other hand, purity of heart and loyalty to the Lord are sought, a man must be willing to stand alone with Him. But as in electrical science so in the realm of spiritual dynamics,—insulation is a necessary condition of light, heat and power.

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

THUS does Mordecai exhort Esther to use the privileges of her exalted position to further the interests of her own race. He sees that God has lifted her to the royal rank which she occupies that she may be His instrument of deliverance. It would not be unnatural for a young girl's head to be turned in such circumstances. Very few in any age could be found with the moral strength to use the influence of such a station for purely patriotic ends. But Esther is such an one, and Mordecai's appeal falls upon ready ears. How she responded to it with splendid faith and courage, and all that was the outcome of her temerity, is the inspiring history of the succeeding days. For she did not hesitate to lose herself, if need be, in the larger interests of the kingdom—only to find herself in a measure which otherwise had been impossible.

This is the heart of the Christian belief in God's overruling providence. He has brought each of us to the Kingdom for such times as those in which we live. Every age has its peculiar problems and difficulties, and needs a peculiar witness and service on the part of God's people. Hence it is our own generation which each of us must seek to bless. And indeed we can do no other. There are tasks lying to hand, which if we do not take up will never be accomplished. There are those with whom we are presently brought into contact who must hear the message of Salvation through our lips or not at all. There is a Will of Christ to be done which we alone can accomplish in this our day. We have by grace been brought to the Kingdom for nothing less. How high is the privilege and responsibility of our lives.

Yet all this availeth me nothing.

WHAT insight do these words give into the mind and character of Haman ! Advanced by royal favour beyond all others in the land, in the enjoyment of all possible honour and riches, having every wish gratified, and exercising almost unlimited power, he is yet dissatisfied because of the unconquered spirit of Mordecai. Envy turns the sweetness of his lot into bitterness. Gold loses its lustre and silk its sheen to the man whose eyes are blinded by prejudice and unholy passion. Such is the human heart, that Haman loses all joy in those things to the acquisition of which he has devoted the entire strength of life, just because he cannot subdue the soul of one upon whom he has come to look as his enemy. It was, as it ever is in such a case, a cloud of his own making which blotted out the sun.

The Word of God is full of exhortation to His children to walk in love. To do anything other is to spoil life utterly. A cherished resentment, an indulged grievance, a cultivated envy, will turn its choicest things to ashes. Indeed, we are all in danger of failing to appreciate and enjoy that which we have because we cannot have something more ! Many an one, like Haman, has come to utter ruin by this course. For it is close to some such hatred that streams of evil purpose and action take their rise, gathering force as they flow. Until at length they become a turbulent flood sweeping away every restraint. It is by such that men who cherish envy and plot evil are themselves ultimately engulfed. Wherefore let us take heed.

Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

THE measure of Mordecai's honour was the measure also of Haman's humiliation. Having plotted for himself the splendour of regal honours, and for the man he hated the bitterness of death, Haman found the tables completely turned against him. For God was not sleeping in regard to His covenant-people. It was He Who stirred up the mind of the king to institute an inquiry which resulted in the recognition of him who had, in earlier days, rendered the throne signal service. Behind all the plots and machinations of a wicked man He sat as the Righteous One executing righteousness and judgment. Thus it came about that by a seeming fortuitous concourse of circumstances Mordecai received all the striking tokens of royal favour which Haman had thought to seize for himself. Nothing was too good for the man whom the king delighted to honour.

Faithfulness to God always brings its own reward, though this does not necessarily take the form of material success and worldly advancement. Indeed, it would seem as though there are not many whom God can trust with such tokens. Most Christians thrive best on persecution and in obscurity. It is invariably the poor of this world who are rich in faith. And God setteth up one and putteth down another as is best designed to further His purpose, and as accords most fittingly with the character of those concerned. The great thing to seek is not that we should be honoured before men, but that we should be found faithful and utterly dependable. Then we shall never fail of the honour that cometh from God only.

. . . who had spoken good for the king.

THIS was Mordecai's abiding record, that he had been loyal to the king in a day when his loyalty meant much to the safety of the sovereign. The glory of the honours heaped upon him at the downfall of Haman was at best perishable. The plaudits of the crowd, as is their nature, soon died away when he became an accepted fact in the life of the city. The high hour of his triumph rapidly toned down to the ordinary levels of life. But this record of his fidelity is imperishable. Moral glory never dims. The courageous achievement of one who, single-handed, accomplishes a great service, does not fade when its rewards have lost their newness. It is thus that the influence of Mordecai's life is an abiding inspiration—not that he became prosperous and rich, but that he was in himself a loyal and true man.

Doubtless in speaking "good for the king" as he had done, Mordecai was unconscious of doing anything unusual. In taking the course he did, he was but expressing his true soul. All involuntarily he acted upon an impulse which was in no wise exceptional; and in so doing he revealed what manner of man he was. In this way life's opportunities come to us all unheralded, and judge us. We act in hours which all unconsciously to us are big with crisis, in strict accordance with our cultivated dispositions. The selfish, cynical, and indifferent man cannot suddenly conquer himself in life's swift tests. What is deepest in us has a way of getting itself said. Thus is our character our destiny.

Whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came.

IT is significant that the joy and gladness which the Jews experienced in this day of rejoicing was literally co-extensive with the proclamation of the royal decree. The intervention of Esther and Mordecai, guided and controlled as we believe by the Spirit of God for the ultimate good of His people, had resulted in their liberty and independence. This was secured to them under the king's seal ; but, like every other proclamation, only became effective as they individually availed themselves of its provisions. Hence it must be proclaimed in every city and village, or how shall they hear their good fortune ? Which thing is more than a mere historic record, being also an allegory of the Greater Proclamation by which is secured to the whole world the unspeakable blessings of redemption. Where that Charter is declared men everywhere have " joy and gladness, a feast and a good day."

How great is the folly of those who, knowing the Gospel of God, are yet content to seek their good things apart from its rich promises and simple conditions. For what they strive for in vain in the world, is offered on unspeakably easy terms by the King's decree. Nothing that the soul needs for its fullest development and highest happiness is withheld from those who are willing to accept God's gifts at His hand. Yet how many stumble at the fact that in personal experience His gifts cannot be separated from His government. It is only where His commandment is honoured that His goodness is known.

The Jews undertook to do as they had begun.

THE sending of portions one to another, and of gifts to the poor, was part of the condition of Jewish freedom. Mordecai the large-hearted, had not forgotten the poorer folk of the nation, nor overlooked the fact that in their poverty the common joy of national independence might be but an empty thing to them, and might even have a sinister meaning, did it not bring them some tangible good. Hence the rich and well-favoured Jews must share their possessions with the less fortunate, and generously help them to appreciate the new inheritance of which all had become partakers. In the first flush of this glad day every one readily acceded to this demand. Better still, however, than any mere spasmodic generosity, was their solemn undertaking to continue to do as they had begun. Herein they are an example to all who, in every age, make undertakings in respect of service to God and man.

It is the long days of ordinary life, the flat level stretches of uninteresting country, that test the reality of our consecration. Not in the exalted hours which infrequently come to any of us, when emotions are quickened under the spell of holy influence, are our professions of devotion and intention really measured. For all men are above themselves at such times. It is in the carrying of consecration, then begun, into days far removed from any outstanding experiences of inspiration, that our continuance in well-doing attests the sureness of our place in the Covenant. Many an one has begun well only to fail under the test of the common-place. To carry out the undertaking of our best moments is the patient work of the longest life.

ESTHER x. 3.

Seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

BROUGHT through affliction and adversity to honour and prosperity, Mordecai used his experience and endowments for the highest and worthiest ends. He consecrated himself in the service of God to the good of His people, and constantly sought their well-being. He held his riches and possessions on trust. He gave not only his substance but himself, in order to secure the advancement of His people. He laboured to establish them on firm foundations which the future could not shake ; and whatever of good was wrought among them in his day was directly traceable to his personal faithfulness. So it is that he passes off the stage of life in unfading light, one of the noblest figures in the history of his race. The sun of such an one never goes down.

If it is true that we live again in other lives—and few will be found to dispute this—how carefully should we guard our influence. For, when life is over and earth recedes from us, the full measure of our living is not to be sought in what we have amassed of wealth or fame, but in what we have accomplished of the saving and sweetening of those amongst whom we have lived as God's representative people. Hence no self-questioning is so much to the point as that by which we sincerely examine the quality of our doings day by day. Am I seeking the good of others or am I indifferent ? Do I seek to bring the peace of God into unrested lives, or does their need leave me unmoved ? Am I living for God's glory or for my own interests alone ?

Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

THESE words of the Patriarch are not a mere expression of stoical indifference. They are the unpremeditated interpretation of what seemed like a terrible calamity. Immediately upon receipt of staggering news he instantly found a satisfying explanation of the unkindly Providence which had wrecked his life. On the instant when his hopes were frustrated and his whole world tumbled about him, he was ready with a sufficient answer to his own heart's queries, and with clear and indubitable witness to those who brought him the evil tidings. It is a great thing for a man to realize when he seems to be overwhelmed that he is really overshadowed. It is a great thing to know that the Lord sometimes, for His own purpose, takes away His own gifts ; and to be assured that since life is under His guidance, the way of sorrow cannot but be the pathway to highest blessedness.

Although God is the author of our mystifying losses, we may be sure that He never contradicts Himself. There is a sanctifying blessing linked up with the taking away of our possessions—His gifts to us. Job is able to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," because he realized in the hour when he most needed Him the abundant reinforcements of Divine grace. Did we but understand at all times that our seeming losses are really gains, since we are Christ's, we should have like irrefutable testimony whose influence upon the world would be beyond all calculation. But this lesson is learned only in the ordinary days of life by our careful maintenance of communion with Him.

And Satan came also among them.

WHENEVER the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord Satan is never far from the assembly. It is when hearts are touched to the finer issues of life that the greatest opportunity is presented, both to the Spirit of God and the spirit of evil. Thus it is that our holiest hours are frequently invaded by unspeakable temptations. He who lives closest to God becomes a target for the fiery darts of the devil, who knows well that if such a man can be laid low the kingdom of darkness loses a potent foe. The strategic design in every temptation is the thwarting of powerful hostility to organized evil and the frustration of blessing to the world.

Temptation takes many forms ; and so skilful is the adversary in disguising himself, that often the very elect are themselves deceived. When the tempter comes as he came to Christian in the Valley, whispering blasphemies, he is easily recognized and repulsed. When, however, he comes as an angel of light, seducing the children of God by fair promises, he is not so readily discovered. Our surest way of avoiding fatal error in this respect is by keeping as close to Christ and to His Word as may be. This is both our responsibility and our safeguard. For He Who is our Surety both answers for us and empowers us to overcome. A positive instinct is created and strengthened by union with Him, so that the enemy is discerned through his disguises and put to flight without parley. This is true growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

Why is light given to a man whose way is hid ?

JOB'S soliloquy on the sorrows of life expresses the disappointment and bitterness of his spirit. Hitherto his faith has risen to a magnificent height of courage. The great crises of loss and disaster found him prepared as a man girt with the knowledge of the faithful God. His hour of desolation had become one of exaltation, and he had faced its critical tests, not only with fortitude but with a positive spirit of victory. Now, however, that high mood has passed from him, and the utter weariness of his heart asserts itself. He realizes how much he has lost and how entirely changed will his life be henceforth in the blackness of despair. He actually declares it had been better for him had he never been born. Thus do men who have lost much by the providential dealings of God sometimes even lose themselves.

The fact is, Job has somehow missed the way. His anguish has blinded him to the pathway of faith. It is as one who denies his former experiences of God that he petulantly cries : " Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in ? " Had he interpreted the dark present by the brighter past he would have known that God gives light to all men to walk by. Even if it only serves to show that the hedges by which life is bounded are protective, it ministers to our peace. And if it but reveals that the pathway, of which we can only see a step at a time, leads us Home, it makes us pilgrims indeed. A man may not know much about the way, but at the same time may be very sure of the direction, and may have no doubt at all as to why he follows on.

His angels be charged with folly.

ELIPHAZ, one of Job's friends, seeks to bring him to a true understanding of his own case by an impressive argument based upon the fact that suffering and calamity are simply the consequence of wrongdoing. This is the limit of his conception of God's ways with man ; and up to his light he seeks to deal faithfully with his friend. His mistake, however, lay in his lack of understanding. For sometimes, as in Job's case, suffering is disciplinary and not punitive. He cannot but conclude that since God in His holiness looks upon the angels as being imperfect, how much more must He see sin in the lives of His children, even in one who was yet as upright as Job. He is convinced that secret evil has brought the flood-tide of sorrow into his life, and that sincere repentance will put things right. Generally speaking, he is correct ; but in this instance he fails to see in Job a man who is passing through the fiery discipline of trial. For he has not yet learned that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

Nevertheless, we do well to lay to heart some of his maxims, and to apply this his conception of God's holiness to ourselves. For there is always danger lest by mere familiarity sin loses its horror to us, and we come to regard it as a light thing easily dealt with. On the other hand, to keep before us lofty conceptions of God's nature and requirements saves us from all self-excusing, and urges us to follow whole-heartedly after that holiness without which no man shall see Him.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth.

IN his own half-instructed state Eliphaz cannot see beyond the fact that positive good comes to the man who accepts the Divine correction of his sin with meekness of spirit. He has not learned for himself that God's chastening is part of His care, and is rich with promise of moral benefit. Hence he seeks to comfort Job with the assurance that if he will but bow beneath God's hand his untoward experiences will remove, his lost riches will recover, and the material evidences of the Divine favour will be restored. That Job is unable to receive such comfort is not to be wondered at, since the man who is in the dark as to God's dealing with him has little heart for mere temporal possessions. For it is not their loss which has really impoverished him, nor is it their restoration which can supply the need of his heart.

Only in the light of Christ's teaching can we truly understand the seeming contradictions of God's love. From Him we have learned that the Father's affection must sometimes take unkindly forms for the blessing of His children. He it is Who makes happiness possible, despite every such experience, by impressing upon us the fact that God cares enough to take pains with us. It is this consciousness which restrains repining and rebellion, and inspires a restful and patient spirit which is content to know that these are but parts of His ways. For, as Christ revealed Him, God's love is so kindly in its redemptive purpose as sometimes to appear unkindly in its processes. And He is content to wait for His own vindication.

Ob that my grief were throughly weighed !

THE charges which Eliphaz has implicitly brought against Job in his remonstrance at his despair, incite him to make rejoinder that his case has not been impartially and justly considered. Eliphaz has heard his murmuring and seen his impatience, but he has not rightly estimated the provocation by which he has been moved. He is convinced that if his sufferings were put on one side, and his expressed vexation on the other side of a balance, it would be found that the one justified the other. He does not deny his impatient and wild murmuring against God ; but he does affirm that he has had reason enough. Not yet at any rate has the upright man come to know himself as unworthy of all self-justification, and utterly dependent upon the mercy and goodness of God for everything. Meanwhile the misconception of his friends is part of the process by which he is being brought, by Divine intent, to an utter end of himself.

Many an one whose attitude meets with criticism and condemnation finds, like Job, a measure of comfort in the fact that were everything known by his critics everything would be forgiven. Sometimes, indeed, this is so ; and yet the fact of being only half-understood by others is one of those experiences which drive a man to the Lord from Whom nothing is hidden. When human sympathy breaks down by sheer lack of understanding, it is good to know that in Him is no darkness at all. His balances are just and equal. And His favour is rich compensation for all the smart we ever suffer from the world's adverse verdicts.

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle.

JOB'S deliverance on the character of human life is full of black pessimism. The light of his former experiences of God's goodness seems to have been totally eclipsed by the hardness of his present lot ; and as he surveys his own course the outstanding quality of life seems to be its brevity. It is as swift as the shuttle of a weaver or the glance of an eye. All of which is true, though not always in the sense which Job meant.

For there is an underlying suggestiveness in this metaphor which surely includes the loom of life, the task of every individual weaver, the perfection of the pattern, and the sure guidance of the God Who gives it. For the work of life is the weaving of eternal character. Each swiftly-passing day adds a thread to the carrying out of the Master's design. And upon every believer rests the responsibility of selecting the material used, and of careful intensity. For the business of life-weaving demands the concentration of our powers. Badly woven patches are permanent ; for they cannot be cut out or rewoven. No better use of to-morrow can atone for an ill-spent to-day. And behind each weaver stands the Great Designer, working out His sure pattern with every co-operating energy of ours. Sometimes it is scarcely possible to see the worth of any single strand ; but we may safely trust Him that nothing is without meaning, and that nothing is wasted in the life consecrated. And sometimes, too, it is hard to understand why dark threads must be interwoven with brighter. But faith is content to know that He knows, and to go on weaving with the unresting but unhasting energy which is controlled by the knowledge that each day is a day of the Lord.

The hypocrite's hope shall perish.

BILDAD'S proverbs, by which he seeks to refute Job's contentions regarding life and God, are a well-meant attempt to attest and establish His righteousness. His retrospect of life and experience confirms him in the belief that, while wickedness may for a time be profitable, yet ultimately God does not fail to vindicate His own character. He contends that Job's punishment is due to some hidden sin, and that consequently his only course is to confess and make amends. Then God will once again visit him with His favour. This word is part of his argument. As the desert grass flourishes but for a day and then withers, being dried up at its roots, so is every hope that is not founded upon sincere relationship with God. The man whose professions are rooted in nothing more stable than himself is doomed to disappointment and calamity. And in this, although Bildad misreads Job's experiences, he is nevertheless right.

The hypocrite is the man who not only sets out consciously to deceive others, but who unconsciously is all the while deceiving himself. His professions of faith have little, if anything, to do with God's claims. They are but part of his own self-interest. He assumes a position and expresses devotion, not because these are the response of his heart to the declared Will of God, but rather because they promise certain outward advantages. The folly of all such insincerity lies in the fact that it cannot survive life's inevitable testings. In the heat of temptation it withers. Before the blast of the storm it is broken. And, like the house built upon the sand, it cannot be rebuilt in the day of calamity. How wise then are they who cultivate entire reality in all their doings with God !

Neither is there any Daysman betwixt us.

JOB'S answer to the contentions of Bildad is one of despair. A man cannot be just with God, he affirms, since it is out of the question that any should vindicate his frailty before His power. Since He is the God of nature Who can remove mountains, shake the earth, darken the sun, and tread the waves of the sea, how can it be possible for a mere man to maintain his cause before Him? And further, since His ways with men do not seem to be justified by any moral reasons which are accessible to them, Job realizes the utter folly of trying to stand in His presence. He realizes, too, that there is no help for him in mere forgetfulness of his complaint, nor in any self-effort to clear himself of guilt. Moreover, the utter helplessness of his position is expressed in the fact that there is no arbiter, whose authority would be mutually accepted, to whom the case as between him and God could be submitted.

Job's plaint is the plaint of fallen humanity. In every age, men, conscious of infinite distance between themselves and God, have cried out for some means of reconciliation. For all men were made for God and are athirst until they find Him. It is just here that the Gospel of Christ meets their intuitive longing. For this is just what He is—a Daysman Who at once touches the Throne of God and reaches down to the lowest levels of our sin-created need. The deep gulf is bridged by the Cross. Once for ever God has reconciled the world unto Himself in Him. The Man Christ Jesus is the one and sufficient Mediator between offended holiness and disquieted conscience.

Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me.

FROM reasoning with his friends, Job turns to reason with God. He is still in the dark as to the motive which inspires the untoward experiences which oppress him but which he yet knows are of God's ordering. In his desire for interpretation of these things, he makes various suggestions as to the Divine meaning of his trials, only, however, to reject each as impossible. For, despite everything, his deepest faith is in God's goodness, and he is unable to reassure himself on any hypothesis which contradicts His Nature. Hence it is that his meditation leads him into thicker darkness. Had he waited, however, without complaint, for the Lord's answer to this his query, how much he would have spared himself of perplexity and of the moral consequences of despair !

How often do men who are uncertain as to the reason and intention of God's dealings with them, re-echo Job's querulous request ! If they can but know the why and wherefore of His discipline, it is easier to bear. And yet it would seem as though faith is best trained in the dark. For God does not always respond to this cry by an immediate illumination. We remember the unanswered query of the Lord Christ Himself : " My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? " And we learn therefrom that the Divine silence is by no means always the consequence of our sinfulness. Thus we are encouraged to trust on, assured of His sympathetic understanding and assistance, and content to wait for the dawning of the Day which shall declare all things.

Oh, that God would speak !

ZOPHAR, the third of Job's friends, misunderstands him, and misinterprets his experiences equally with the other two. He cannot accept Job's strong assertions of his own uprightness, and looks upon him as one who, while being justly punished for sin, refutes the charge of shortcoming. He cannot understand why Job should speculate upon God's motive. To him it would be the height of wisdom to accept correction in the light of an atonement for sins committed. Since, however, calamity and distress have not succeeded in impressing this obvious fact upon him, he cries almost despairingly that if God would Himself speak to Job with unmistakable voice all would be well. For He surely would be able to bring home to him the guilt which seems too deep-seated for conviction by any intermediate method. His mistake, however, lay in the fact that he could not recognize that God was already speaking, and that every discipline of circumstance was His message to His servant.

The mistake of Zophar is all too common in our own day. We fail to appreciate God's voice speaking through the controlled circumstances of life, and in consequence fail to recognize the direction of His will and to take it. We seek for some striking and overwhelming manifestation of Him, when all the time He is making His way known to us. Above all, we are apt to forget that He has fully and finally spoken to us in Christ Who is the Living Word. He has nothing more to say to us than He has already said in Him.

JOB xii. 9.

Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this ?

JOB'S indignant irony is the only answer he can make to his three advisers, each of whom has outdone the other in the futility of their reasoning. For they have been challenging him with the most obvious truisms regarding God and His ways. The moral lessons they have sought to inculcate are the very elementary things of the life of faith—such things indeed as any one could learn from nature itself. Confident in their own wisdom they have entirely evaded the great question which is agitating his mind and beclouding his vision. For he is not concerned with the conflict between the Divine nature and human sin. It is a mere axiom that sin is a breach of the Divine law and consequently merits punishment. What troubles him is the difficulty he has in harmonizing the exercise of Divine power with the Divine justice and benevolence. He knows full well, and is surprised that any one should think otherwise, that it is God's hand which has wrought such devastation in his life. It is an indictment of their supposed wisdom that they should imagine this to be a matter of any doubt.

However heavy the burden of anxiety and suffering may be, there is always rest in the midst of strife to the one who has the assurance that all has come to him by God's hand. For behind the hand of Power is the heart of Love and the mind of Wisdom. Nothing can hence miscarry, nor can anything be other than disguised good. Having this certainty, faith can afford to wait for the rest.

Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.

FROM his friends Job turns to God, strong in confidence that His justice will appraise his righteousness at its true value. Still upheld by his sense of personal uprightness, he does not fear to bring his case directly to God for judgment. Hitherto his heart has not condemned him in regard to his way; and though he is perplexed beyond measure at the things which have come upon him, he has never lost his firm trust in the ultimate justice of God. Indeed, it is safe to say that faith has seldom reached a higher level than in this declaration. Even if God should slay him he will not cease to trust in Him. For, indeed, faith is a deathless thing. It will not only survive even such a test, but will actually gather strength from it. And he will still maintain his ways before Him, since his faith is allied to a good conscience.

This is the secret of heart-ease in days when no satisfactory solution to the mystifying providences which darken life can be found elsewhere than in the Sanctuary. The simple faith which, while it cannot understand God's ways, yet clings to His nature as revealed in Christ, makes panic impossible. We may not know what He is doing with us, but we do know Him! However perverse our circumstances may be, they cannot contradict everlasting love. Nor can He rescind the promise of His Gospel to lead us right Home. Hence what matter though the pathway is steep and rugged beyond all our expectation? And what is a little space of time, however dark, in comparison of a deathless eternity in the light which reveals all things?

Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ?

CONFRONTED by the ultimate problems of life, Job is entirely at a loss to find solution of any of them save in God. He is infinitely more conscious of his own need of Him than any of his counsellors can imagine, for with his sense of God has grown up a sense of his own sinfulness also. Those who challenge and taunt him can teach him nothing as to his sinful nature. Nor can they enlighten him as to the problems which it sets up. He has long since come to an end of his own energies, and has learned his powerlessness to transform his own disposition. He knows full well how entirely ineffective are his best efforts after self-cleansing. If any good thing is to come out of his life it can only be by the Divine miracle of transformation. God alone can bring a clean out of an unclean thing.

This is at once the glory of the Gospel of Christ and the confusion of its critics. He undertakes to receive men, whatever their moral state, and, by the processes of grace of which He alone is Master, to renew them completely. That He accomplishes this undertaking, the changed lives of His people in every age attest. What need, then, is there for any of us to despair, even though the light from Heaven has revealed our innate sinfulness ? If we will but yield us to His control this wonder shall be wrought. The clean shall come out of the unclean as a proof of His power. Faith shall be verified to ourselves by an experience of His power, and vindicated before the world in the evidence of a transformed life.

Thou . . . restrainest prayer before God.

ELIPHAZ once again takes up the tale against Job, and this time with more vehemence and scorn. He has misread Job's attitude, and is entirely unable to understand either his self-justification or his deduction of the Divine character from the seeming contradiction between God's doings and His promises. He cannot fathom the depths of anguish through which Job is passing, and his interpretation of him is altogether superficial. Hence this charge of failure to maintain his prayer-life and to fulfil his obligations of worship really fails of point. That he cannot understand Job, by no means implies that God does not understand him. The deeper loyalties of the soul are often too deep for the expression of conventional piety. Such an one as Job may not be able to pray, even though his faith clings with primitive intensity to the God Who is at once its perplexity and its only hope.

This charge, wrongly made against Job, is however true of many a modern believer who is, or ought to be, living on higher planes of fellowship than those of the Patriarch. How many there are whose lives are weak and whose witness is ineffective just because of their slackness in prayer ! Their activities are multiplied, and their energies engaged in a hundred directions ; but their prayer-life is whittled down to negligible dimensions. They spend but minutes in the Sanctuary for the hours they spend in the street. And their every economy of time spent in prayer unerringly declares itself in the quality of life. To fail here is to fail entirely. For prayer is the tap-root of all Christian grace and of all power for Christian service.

I was at ease, but He hath broken me asunder.

ALTHOUGH not yet wholly interpreted to him, Job is beginning to realize that the permissive Will of God has been behind all his material losses and mental anguish. With the dawning of this truth comes the comfort of its inevitable corollary that these things are parts of God's ways for His perfecting. He realizes that the ease of his former life must needs be disturbed that he may acquire moral qualities which do not flourish under summer suns. And it is this consciousness which takes the bitter sting out of events which have proved too much for him. For how can he resent the doings of Eternal Love? That love must sometimes express itself in harsh ways for his good, is the simple fact which his own experience of fatherhood has taught him. He is now learning the wholesome lesson that the Lord "scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

If we in our turn directed the energy we are wont to expend on resentment at second causes toward the understanding of God's ways, how rich in its experience of Him would life become! We chafe under the very thing which is designed to forward our progress Heavenward. We are angry at the gale which seems to threaten our destruction; whereas if we set our sails aright it would but blow us toward Home. We are so wise in our own conceits that we misread the promises which come to us written in an unfamiliar hand, and mistake them for a menace. We look upon what is really God's care as a cruel calamity, and so lose both faith and peace. One of our greatest needs is to know that nothing reaches us of which He is not the Author.

The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

STILL strong in the consciousness of his own uprightness, Job ventures to affirm, in answer to the wearisome strictures of Eliphaz, that, even though God Himself should side with those who condemn him, he intends to persist in the pathway of innocency which he has hitherto trod. In his heart of hearts, however, he knows that such a contingency will never arise, for it is before God that his heart condemns him not. An unoffended conscience is the inspiration of his confidence. He has a noble determination to pursue the way of integrity, confident that he will gather strength as he goes. Hands which are not defiled by evil engagement cannot but wax stronger for every expenditure of energy. Supported by this certainty Job can be scornful of his critics.

In another sense to that in which Job made this declaration, we may, and ought to make it the steadfast determination of our hearts. In fulness of light to which he was a stranger, the way of righteousness has been made known to us in Christ. He has shown us the path of life, and it is ours to hold to it despite every temptation to turn aside, and every opposition which we meet therein. For the way of His discipleship is no smooth and easy one. Lions are to be met there—but they are chained! Apollyon suggests his foul blasphemies, and delivers his crushing blows. But the hand that grasps the Sword becomes stronger for each contest. It is made strong by the arms of the Mighty God of Jacob.

This is the place of him that knoweth not God.

QUITE unable to comprehend either Job's experience or the expressions of his faith, Bildad again takes up the tale of God's retributive judgments upon sin. He can see nothing in him but one who has incurred the Divine displeasure, and has not soul enough to make humble confession and contrite amendment. Like sharp cracks of a whip, his staccato sentences fall on Job's lacerated spirit, each declaring the character of that punishment which he must expect as his desert. Darkness, disease, destruction and death are the portion of all such as him. His condemnation is sealed by his own deeds. Such an one can have no place in the economy of a righteous God. In all this Bildad only shows the very elementary nature of his own appreciation of God and His ways. He may understand the relationship between sin and judgment, but he certainly knows nothing of those processes of pain by which God's truest servants are moulded into vessels meet for His use.

Thus do men still misread the experience of others, and pronounce unworthy judgments which really reflect upon their own ignorance rather than upon the moral state of those against whom they pronounce. Many a suffering saint has his darkness deepened by the unwarrantable strictures of those who do not understand through what he is passing. It is a poor thing that any of us should be successors of Bildad; and we do well to lay to heart Christ's injunction regarding meddlesomeness with the spiritual concerns of another. "What is that to thee? Follow thou ME."

The hand of God hath touched me.

THE pitiless scorn of his so-called friends makes Job more than ever conscious of his utter loneliness in God's universe. Still unenlightened as to God's ultimate meaning in these experiences of sorrow and loss, and unable to find any measure of sympathetic understanding on the part of his fellows, his mental distress not unnaturally gets the better of him, and he pleads for pity. For no man, however self-conscious he may be in regard to his moral state, can be satisfied to live under the contempt of his fellows. But his plea failed to move them. If it is true that the hand of God has touched him it is only because he deserved it. To consort with him, therefore, would be to condone his misdoing, and to become partaker of his sin. Thus they reasoned with themselves and turned from him. The irony of the situation is that in their self-righteousness they were a whole universe further from God than Job was.

It is no uncommon thing that the one who seeks to follow and serve Christ should realize himself bereft of human sympathy. For the servant is not above his Master. There are never wanting those who seem to take savage delight in rubbing salt into open wounds—in the name of religion. Their words are like the poison-sting of serpents. Many an one has been betrayed into retaliation under their attack, to the loss of his own heart-rest and to the disturbance of his supporting confidence in God. None wholly escape such assaults who are in the fellowship of the Son of God. But, like Him, we may always escape from man's pitilessness in the great pity and peace of the Father.

JOB xx. 5.

The joy of the hypocrite but for a moment.

ZOPHAR who resumes the hurling of vindictive charges against Job is as blind as his companions. All that he urges is entirely irrelevant to Job's case, and strikingly undeserved. He is a mere blind religionist, who delights in over-emphasizing the strictures of God's Law to the discomfiture of him whom he holds guilty of its breach. His is certainly zeal which is not according to knowledge, nor is there anything in his intemperate wrath which identifies him in the slightest degree with the God whose self-appointed advocate he professes to be. It is in angry sarcasm that he challenges Job's knowledge, "Knowest thou not this of old—that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?" Notwithstanding all that he has seen of the afflicted man he persistently refuses to regard him as other than a wicked hypocrite.

It is often the keenest suffering of a good man that he should be misjudged, as though his devotion to the things of God is but a cloke of self-interest—and worse. Nothing is harder to bear than to have one's good evil spoken of. And yet this was ever the experience of the Saviour, "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." And in the following of His example lies both our safety and the discomfiture of our foes. The temptation to retaliate is a real one, against which we cannot too resolutely set ourselves. For what does it advantage us even though we silence a detractor, if in the doing of it we violate the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus?

As for me, is my complaint to man ?

IF Job's cause had been against man only, that is, against the second causes of his troubles, he would not have found himself so distressed. It would have been a simple matter to ignore them and to confide as ever in the Lord's faithfulness. His difficulty, however, is a far deeper one. He is perplexed and pained at the apparent contradictions of God. The moral chaos in which things seem to move, apart from any controlling Will of wisdom and love, fills him with a doubt which is keenest distress. For if his faith in Him is finally disturbed the whole groundwork of his life is destroyed. Moreover, he has borne witness to God's faithfulness and has declared His righteousness to the whole world. Anything, therefore, which would now seem to cancel the value of all this is nothing short of calamity.

God's ways are indeed past finding out, nor is it at all certain that we need to find them out. Submission and obedience always bring, even to the most perplexed, enough light to walk by. When we cannot read the whole volume of His wisdom, we can always read a line at a time—and one line is sufficient for present need. Meanwhile every ray of light is a promise and prophecy of entire illumination to which we shall one day come. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know afterwards," is the Lord's reassurance to every timid and troubled one. At the same time we may always be confident that nothing which is really vital to the maintenance of life-giving relationship with God is ever hidden from us. We have the light of life even when we cannot see the Sun.

Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace.

ELIPHAZ is still obsessed with the idea that since it is impossible that God should visit Job for his uprightness, He must be punishing him for some hidden sin. In consequence, he does not hesitate to accuse him of impieties of every order, on the principle that if he makes the indictment full enough some of its counts will certainly be true. With the first glimpse of any concern beyond that of condemnation yet shown by any of the three, he entreats Job to acquaint himself with God, and paints an alluring picture of the benefits that shall thereby come to him. Indeed, in these verses (21-30) he reaches a loftier strain than he might have been thought capable of from his previous speeches. Its only fault lay in its assumption that Job did not already know God. It was good counsel mistakenly applied to the case of one who was already far deeper in the Divine counsels than, in the nature of the case, Eliphaz himself could ever be.

Throughout Old and New Testaments alike God is always represented as desirous of revealing Himself to the understanding of men. First to an individual, then to a chosen nation, and eventually to an entire world, He has declared Himself in terms of creation and redemption. Fully and finally He is made known to us in Christ, Who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. It is now the responsibility of all to acquaint themselves with Him—a responsibility which is at once heightened and simplified by the Saviour's loving invitations.

He knoweth the way that I take.

DESPITE everything which he cannot understand Job still clings to the fact of God's righteousness. He knows beyond doubt that since his own conscience is void of offence God cannot deal unjustly with him. In his dark days his respect for the moral law has never weakened. It is as though he said, "I may not know what God is doing, but I do know what He has commanded." "He knoweth the way that I take because it is His way, and because, in spite of my feebleness, I am doing my best to live as one who has seen and realized the perfection of the Law of the Lord." Hence it is that his faith, although mystified, refuses to be eclipsed. He holds firm to the belief that God is working, although he is unable to see any present evidence of His energy.

Men may live without the full explanation of earthly trials, but they cannot live without the inspiration of heavenly aids. It is quite possible to go on walking in darkness in regard to the reason for things which are happening about us—waiting for the Day which shall declare them. But it is not possible to live without the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit. And thank God! it is not necessary. "He knoweth the way that I take," says the steadfast believer, "and because He knows, I shall come forth as gold refined in the fire, and minted as the currency of the Kingdom of God to supply the need of the impoverished, and to add to the resources of God in this bankrupt world."

No man is sure of life.

ALTHOUGH part of Job's ironical answer to his counsellors, in which he gives them a true description, according to his mind, of the course of such a wicked man as they have declared him to be, this word is nevertheless as full of meaning for all time as it is full of truth. Job suggests that none can play with sin or trifle with the laws of God with impunity. Men must pay forfeit with their lives who wilfully traverse His commandments. The one who persists in evil courses lives in constant jeopardy, knowing that the wages of sin must ultimately be paid in full. It is part of Job's justification that he himself has no such apprehension regarding his life. The assurance of a good conscience toward God supports him in his contention with those who so readily condemn him for an evil man masquerading as a good one.

Apart from its significant expression of the consequence of sin, this word is of moment also as being a reminder of the uncertainty and brevity of life, and its opportunities. It emphasizes the urgency of present duty. Days are fast slipping past never to return. Neglected tasks and unfulfilled responsibilities can never be atoned for by any future faithfulness. To-day is the great day for every one who names the Name of Christ. It is the one day of which we are all certain, and its very transiency urges upon us the necessity of using it faithfully and well. For it may not be much further prolonged. Seedtime may much more quickly pass into harvesting than we imagine.

Upon whom doth not His light arise?

BILDAD labours to prove that which Job's faith assumes. The majesty and might of God are matters about which he has never had any doubt. But this his more than half-blind friends cannot understand. Thus it is that Bildad heaps sarcasm upon him as upon one who imagines himself capable of coming to God's assistance. In a clumsy attempt at irony, he tries to hold Job up to scorn as a man who imagines that God needs the aid of his knowledge. He represents him as guilty of thinking himself wiser than God, and points his shaft by this sarcastic query as to the Divine power and beneficence. Is there any upon whom God's light does not shine freely? Does not His sun illumine the just and unjust alike? And yet, so great is Job's moral folly that he presumes—as he affirms—to contend with and dictate to Him.

Apart from its original significance, this challenge is both descriptive of God's creative work and prophetic of His redeeming enlightenment of men. True, at the beginning He made the day and formed the light. Still truer is it that in the fulness of time He came Who is the Light of the whole world. It is in Him that we have seen light and discerned the path Homeward. Do we always remember that this involves us in the responsibility of reflection? If He has shined into our hearts, it is only that He may shine through our lives upon a world lost in the darkness of sin. And if there are yet those upon whom His light doth not arise surely the responsibility rests upon those who do not fulfil their obligation.

Lo, these are parts of His ways.

THE sublimest conceptions of God's power in Nature are altogether inadequate to express His processes of Grace. He is infinitely greater than man's thought of Him. His power cannot be declared within the poor limits of human speech. Job's heart may be awed at every evidence of His greatness ; but there is that which lies beyond every visible manifestation of His might which invests life with a reverence far deeper than mere awe. He knows that God's greatest work is not either in the shaping or shaking of the universe, but in the human soul. Before the work of perfecting man by all the processes of which He alone is Master, every other exhibition of His omnipotence fades into obscurity. To Job's vision is opened a discernment of His ways of which his friends are, in the nature of the case, entirely unaware.

It is the support of every believer that God's ways are utterly beyond his ken. Indeed, to divest His purposes and doings of mystery would be to invest them with insufficiency. For we must needs have a God Who is greater than our own hearts. Hence it is that when perplexed by the difficulty of reconciling our experiences with His assurances, our poverty with His promises, our weakness with His Word, we are able to endure if we know that these things are but "parts of His ways." The hidden part—the part yet to be revealed—is always better than our hopes and fears. "It hath not entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it.

JOB is astonished and vexed that his friends refuse to credit what they have themselves seen of his integrity. His life has been lived before them, and they have never in the days of his prosperity charged him with lack of uprightness. It is no idle boast which asserts the consistency of his actions with his faith. Upheld by the assurance of an unoffended conscience, which even his perplexing experiences have not been able to disturb, he has no fear in declaring his willingness to stand or fall by the quality of his life, which has been patent to all. Happy is the man who does not fear the scrutiny of the unkindest eyes, having lived his life before God, Whose judgment, though infinitely kind, is also infinitely searching.

It is a mere truism to say that those who profess the faith of God are constantly under the inspection of the world. Upon this fact, indeed, Christ based his exhortations to witness-bearing. The fact that the world takes its measure of Him from what it sees of His displayed character in the lives of His followers, gives a seriousness to our every hour. For inconsistent conduct reflects not upon us only, but upon Him. Discrepant lives are the most powerful denial of His Gospel. Hence the quality of our love to Him is accurately expressed in the vigilant care with which we watch our actions, lest in any respect they should appear as unworthy of the faith we profess. Let us see well to it, that, since so much depends on our fidelity, we give "no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed."

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

COMING at the end, and as the crown of a noble disquisition on the subject of wisdom and the search for it, this word is full of personal meaning to us all. Even in the abstract the search for wisdom demands the utmost energy on the part of men. And when found it is precious beyond all compare. Yet there is a way to its acquisition which is available to the humblest. By searching, however diligently and at whatever cost, no man can really compass the wisdom of God. It is unattained by any intelligent exercise, however sincerely undertaken. But the veriest child may reach out unto it along the pathway of moral surrender and energy. That which is hidden from sage and prudent men is revealed unto babes.

Wisdom in its abstract meaning is the power of rightly estimating relative worth. Of what avail then is it when acquired, if men do not thereby make determining choice between the material and spiritual, the temporal and eternal things of life? The truest way of becoming "wise unto salvation" therefore is to adopt at the outset the attitude of moral desire. The one whose whole intent is to fear God, and whose most active purpose is to depart from evil, is already "in the way of His commandments." To such He Who is the Wisdom of God incarnate has said: "Every one that seeketh, findeth." For what was abstract to the faith of Old Testament days is personal to us. Christ Himself is the Wisdom, as well as the Power, of God.

Ob that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me.

THE sufferings of the present only serve to make Job vividly conscious of the lost happiness of former days. He looks back with regret and longing to the unclouded joy and unbroken peace which he had when certain of the Lord's preservation. His friends have misjudged him, and by their strictures have added poignancy to his grief. Their clumsy though well-meant attempts to do him good are far removed from the gentleness of God's method, of which in days gone by he was the happy subject. His mistake, however, is in the implied doubt as to the Lord's constancy. He has not yet learned that He is unchangeable, and that nothing but revolt on their part can pluck His sons out of His hand.

Who has not, like Job, cried for a reversion to former happy experiences? In days when the sun is hidden we are all apt to imagine it will not shine again, and all unconsciously to magnify to ourselves the brightness of days now gone for ever. As a matter of fact, were our prayer in this respect to be granted we should be poor indeed. For it is not in gladness and brightness that the soul prospers most. Character is developed under stress of storm and pain and disappointment. We should be lacking in many of its finer constituents were our lives for ever undisturbed. God does not repeat his former mercies, just because we have outgrown their need. Moreover, His present and future blessings are incomparably greater. For His riches are unsearchable and go out far beyond our thought.

JOB xxx. 9.

And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword.

ALMOST the bitterest portion in Job's lot is the fact that those upon whom he has always looked down as being his inferiors now hold him in contempt. Looking upon his state of misery, they can only interpret it as being proof that God has forsaken him. Hitherto they have not unnaturally envied his prosperity, and identified it with God's favour. Now, however, they make him the butt of their ridicule, and coin his misfortunes into a proverb. Perplexed as he is by God's inexplicable dealings with him, and by testings of faith which are almost insupportable, he is provoked beyond measure by their barbed words. Secret grief is hard enough to bear. To have it made public in such a way as this, adds a thousand-fold to its intensity.

While not carried to the same lengths as with Job, there are few Christians who do not know what the contempt of the world is. For Christ is still the "despised and rejected of men"; and those who profess His friendship are often identified with Him in this same respect. When a cynical world does not hesitate to call the Master of the house Beelzebub, it yet more readily curses them of His household. To bear such treatment without resentment is beyond the power of flesh and blood. But herein is the grace of Christ's sufficiency for His followers. He Who "when He was reviled reviled not again" is able to make them also gracious. Indeed, He has bidden them even bless those who persecute them! And this command, like all His words, is instinct with dynamic power.

31 I have . . . eaten my morsel myself alone.

ONCE again Job is found protesting his innocence of any outstanding fault which should merit punishment upon the scale he has endured. He does not, like many another, justify himself by lowering the standards of the Divine requirement. With a high conception of what God demands he has also an equally sincere determination to examine his own life without favour. Thus he judges himself with all honesty, and in his survey covers most of the realms in which men live and meet their temptations. It is most striking that he should not condemn himself for any lack of benevolence. In the days of his affluence he shared what he had with the needy. If he fared sumptuously there was no beggar left at his gate unrelieved. In this respect, at least, he is able to challenge those to whom his manner of life has been an open book.

Here is a lofty ideal of the obligation which rests upon all who are, in any degree, enriched by God's goodness. His gifts are not merely a personal blessing for our own use, but an enduement for the ministry of sympathy. They are not merely a treasure to be prized, but a trust to be administered. And in nothing is this so true as in the gift of the Bread of Life. We must not merely satisfy our own souls by feeding upon Him while all around us, not to speak of those in the Regions Beyond, are the many who have never yet tasted that the Lord is gracious. We must break and distribute to them, or we shall ourselves lose the saving sweetness of the Heavenly Manna. Gratitude to the Lord is expressed by liberality to His poor.

JOB xxxii. 22.

For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.

ELIHU, who has previously been silent out of respect for the age of the three who have contended with Job, speaks with truer insight into the ways of God than any of them. He is confessedly a young man who lacks their experience, but who realizes within himself an inspiration of the Divine Spirit. And whatever may be said in regard to his understanding of Job's case, he certainly has a lofty conception of the prophetic office, and seeks to observe the seemingly restrictions which must be upon all who claim to speak in God's Name. Thus he avows himself unable to use any insincere flattery toward those to whom he brings a message. To go beyond the Word of the Lord in this respect was in his eyes a matter so serious as to involve dismissal from His service.

The man who would preserve his integrity as a servant of God must see to it that he guards his independence. One of the unconscious tributes paid to Christ by His enemies was that He regarded not the person of any man but spoke the Word of God impartially. And all who would be acknowledged as His disciples must seek to emulate Him in this respect. The temptation to look upon men's outward things, and to modify the Divine message according to their earthly position, is one against which all who seek to serve Him must set themselves. Anything short of utter faithfulness involves forfeiture of the Divine inspiration. It is no trifling thing to be entrusted with the Word of the Lord, but a serious obligation demanding seriousness.

We shall see His face with joy.

THE one who could declare this as the certain consequence of a man's approach to God in prayer must of necessity have known Him by personal experience. Elihu's claim to inspiration would certainly seem to have rested upon his own communion with God—as indeed it must do with all men. Prayer does not mean to him the mere proffering of requests and the receiving of gifts. His place in the Sanctuary is as a mountain-peak from which he sees the King in His beauty, and beholds the Land that is very far off. Thus it is that he can declare a message which encourages those who are in the darkness of perplexity to call upon God. Like healing balm it must have fallen upon the tired soul of the much-tried patriarch. The thought of seeing God's face again after his many days of gloom could not but re-create hope within his heart.

To see God is no mere emotional self-persuasion. For He discloses Himself to the eye of faith and to love's long-sighted vision with the clearness of the morning. Shining through all earth's moral half-lights, He shows the Homeward track to pilgrim feet, and supports them in their toilsome journey. His people are a race who "endure as seeing Him Who is invisible." The world may not see Him. Indeed, the world never has seen Him since it crucified Him on a cross of shame. But in His Word, and by His Spirit, His disciples see Him without interruption. This is the joy which no man taketh from them.

When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble ?

GLIMPSES of light here and there flash out of Elihu's cloudy utterance ; for although he has but little understanding of Job's case, he is yet a man who is not altogether without knowledge of God and His ways. The futility of his counsel lies in the fact that he entirely misconceives both God's purpose and Job's attitude in this continued experience of trial. He has read but a little in the book of God, and still less it would appear in the book of the human soul. This, however, he has learned—that God's power transcends man's weakness, and that His defence is stronger than every hostile offensive which at any time threatens His children. He can quell every storm which the wrath of man causes, and in the midst of agitation can yet keep His own in perfect peace. Such an assurance is a much-needed phrasing of the Gospel, which, anticipated centuries before He came, is only fulfilled in its truest meaning in Christ.

Every Christian is committed by his profession of discipleship to the opposition of a world at enmity with his Master. No one who ever followed His steps has avoided a troubled life. Yet none who have companied with Him have failed to realize the strength of His peace—not merely as an inward experience but as an outward victory over all that disturbs. When He comes across the storm-swept waters He not only brings calm to the worried men in the boat, but He rebukes the turbulent elements also. Then, " with Christ in the vessel we smile at the storm." For " when He giveth quietness " every threatening foe is disarmed. And it is in the power of His peace that we can go on with our work and witness undisturbed.

God . . . Who giveth songs in the night.

THIS is a conception of God which is only reached by personal knowledge of His sufficiency in circumstances of unusual need. The dark night of sorrow, loneliness, and fear, is no uncommon experience to His children, and its temptation to disheartenment and even to denial of the Faith is known to most of us. Yet none have ever gone into the darkness alone. His face may be hidden from our sight, but the support of His hand is never withdrawn. The gloom may blot out much that has hitherto delighted the eye, but it cannot interfere with the heart's consciousness of His presence. And the satisfied heart inspires the song of the Lord. Cut off from every other delight, all that He is becomes a more vivid reality than were otherwise possible. So it was with Paul and Silas who, at midnight in the prison-house, sang praises to Him Who was their Companion in tribulation. And the song proved more powerful than the bolts and bars which imprisoned them !

How much of the depression under which many true Christians live would be dispelled by the song of the Lord ! And how many pilgrims of the night would be guided Home through the darkness if we made a practice of singing of His tender mercies as a challenge to the gloom ! Is it not because we somehow lose Him when the thick blackness is round about us, that we are dumb and our faith is voiceless ? For He does not fail to give both the subject of the song and the voice to those who seek Him in the hour of need.

He that is perfect in knowledge is with thee.

ONCE more Elihu speaks more truly than he knows. For the experiences of Job are nothing less than the expression of a Divine wisdom which is infallible. God makes no mistakes in the discipline of His people's lives. When He puts the gold into the furnace, it is not that it should be consumed but refined. When He lays a burden on His child, it is not to crush him but to make him so realize his need of supporting strength that he will betake him to the Sanctuary. Far from disproving His care, Job's trials are in reality proof of God's interest. Hence their duration is already fixed. Not for an hour beyond what is needed will the pressure of sorrow and perplexity be imposed. All His purposes are moral and spiritual, and when these are effected the great Craftsman changes His tools.

Did we always reckon upon God's presence—even when we cannot realize Him—how many mistaken steps should we avoid! Nor would it be hard to relinquish our preconceived plans in favour of His Will. And thus should we reach to something of the height of the ideal life. For we should find His precepts to be instinct with dynamic strength, and should know ourselves equal to "all things through Christ Who strengtheneth." Why should all this be in the realm of the unattainable, since He has said, "Lo, I am with you always"? Can it be that we are not willing to pay the price of His companionship? For it is certain that our fitful minds must be brought into entire subjection to His perfect knowledge if we are to walk together.

He respecteth not any that are wise of heart.

NOTHING so surely disturbs a man's relationship with God as any departure from the attitude of simple faith and dependence. For God teaches men not academically but in practical life. His aim is not to impart abstract wisdom concerning the ultimate realities, but to make men His sons in very deed. The truest commentary on His words is obedience. To the obedient soul all the Heavenly riches of wisdom and knowledge, which are for ever hidden in Christ, are disclosed and imparted. While there are many things obscure now which are likely to remain obscure for all time, there is no mystery, the elucidation of which is necessary to our growth in grace, upon which He does not shed illumination to the humble seeker after holiness. But pride of heart and self-sufficiency make it impossible for Him to dwell with men.

The wisdom of God has always appeared foolishness to the world—and always will. For its demands cut deep at the root of human glory and self-esteem. Its sign-manual is a Cross. And Christ's teaching entirely reverses human judgment, setting up standards which seem entirely to conflict with personal interests. To embrace them, therefore, is apparent folly. But of such folly is true wisdom born. For things hidden from wise and prudent—who fear to venture out upon a life of faith—are revealed unto babes who take Him simply at His word. In the Kingdom of Heaven it is the little ones who alone are great. The wisdom of the wise is of little account in comparison with the inerrant knowledge of the end from the beginning which is His.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.

AFTER the expostulation of his friends has ceased, and when his own passionate self-defence and complaint have ended, God at length breaks the silence of dark days and speaks Himself to His servant. With noise of thunder and rush of whirlwind God manifests Himself in sublimer majesty than Job has ever hitherto witnessed ; and while He does not answer his queries, nor justify His own perplexing ways, the mere fact that God is once again communing with him cannot but fill Job's heart with peace. His message is an assurance of His might. Without entering into the mysterious providences which have harassed and mystified His servant, He gives him a view of His power in creation and in the world of Nature intended to lift him out of self-concern. For he is shown that man is but a small factor in the great scheme of things, and that as God does not fail in other realms, neither does He make any mistake in the ordering of individual human affairs.

It is significant, not only to Job but to us all, that God should declare Himself through the thunder. It would almost seem more appropriate that He should speak in gentler tones to one who has borne so much. And yet does not His appearing through the whirlwind emphasize the meaning of all the experiences of upset and sorrow which Job has undergone ? These have all been His way of imparting strength to his life. The clouds and thick darkness have been evidence not of His withdrawal but of His presence. He has made the winds His chariot. What has seemed like wrath has been in reality lovingkindness. And God is still the same. If we will listen for His voice when the storm beats upon our lives we shall not fail to catch the message from Heaven.

Knowest thou the time? . . . Canst thou number the months?

GOD challenges Job in respect of the complaint he has variously uttered regarding the mysteriousness of His ways, by analogy from the world of seen things. If there are secrets in Nature which do not yield to the persistent inquiry of men ; if there are processes whose laws, despite all searching, cannot be ascertained ; if there are common things whose working is beyond the power of human discovery—is it unlikely that in the sphere of infinite and eternal things man should feel himself lost ? Job has taken himself too seriously, as though his former experiences of God had somehow lifted him above the limitations to which all human knowledge of the Divine doings is subject. By impressing upon him the fact that there are innumerable things all around which entirely baffle the human mind, God seeks to make him realize the majesty and sovereignty of His working.

It is well for us to realize that God's ways are past finding out. Faith does not seek to know His reasons. For faith worketh by love, and love is utterly without suspicion. Faith refuses to relax its steadfast hold upon God's goodness because His ways appear to be contradictory of immediate personal advantage. Faith recognizes that at present it knows but in part, and is willing to wait for the full revelation until God discloses Himself in eternal light. And as with Job, so with us also. Faith comes into its own by realizing that the little it knows of God is a prophecy of all that shall one day satisfy its every desire.

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee?

JOB has begun to recover his disturbed consciousness of fellowship with God. And it is one of the marks of his recovery that he is vividly aware of his own littleness. In comparison with the world of Nature to which God has compelled his attention, he realizes that as an individual he is altogether of no account. In contrast with the holiness of God, of which he has been more than ever made aware in the days of his sufferings, he is compelled to confess his moral worthlessness. He has seen himself in the white light of God's mercy, and has lost all the self-esteem which up to now has supported him in his contention against the justification of God's ways. And he is now not far from that full revelation of God for which his heart cries out. For it is ever the man who is humbled under His mighty hand—not merely by calamity and overthrow, but by the consciousness of His transcendent goodness—who is in due time exalted.

Job is no longer desirous of maintaining his own cause before God. Self-revelation has made him dumb in regard to self-justification. He has nothing to answer to God; for no answer is possible beyond that of surrender and submission to His gracious authority. At last he is content to be silent to the Lord, not in dumb acquiescence of the inevitable but in entirely satisfied trust. He is awed, not into the cringing fear of a slave, but into the clinging fear of a son. And in this he is the forerunner of all who see God face to face.

Canst thou ?

FROM the parable of the great monster which cannot be captured by hook or spear, Job is yet further convinced of the greatness of the Creator. For He is infinitely greater than His leviathan creation. Just as there are things Job cannot know, so, too, there are things which he cannot do. Nature is defiant of subjugation and mocks at man's puny efforts to control her. And if man is not completely master in the lower realms, is it to be wondered at that in the higher realms of life he is found morally impotent, and utterly dependent upon the grace of God ?

This is the lesson which God is ever teaching us, and to which we do well to take earnest heed. For we are all prone to regard ourselves as competent for the tasks of life, and it is often only after bitter failure that we come to ourselves. How many sore experiences of moral overthrow, with painful consequence, should we avoid if we but hearkened diligently to the teaching of God's Word and Spirit, and learned our weakness not by painful folly but in the sure teaching of Him Who knows "what is in man." Let us look life squarely in the face and measure our strength against its demands, as God challenged Job to do in respect of this great monster. It is in every respect a wholesome thing to do, and convinces us of our strengthlessness as nothing else can ever do. And then let us hearken afresh to Him Who covenants strength that is made perfect in weakness. The end of our communing with life and with Him will be the renewal of our hearts unto humble and unwavering dependence.

JOB xlii. 10.

The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

FRUSTRATED prosperity, destroyed hope, alienated sympathy, and the night of black darkness, have all led to this. Job is henceforth a richer man than he has ever been, and a truer. Not that his material possessions were necessarily greater than those he had lost ; for a man's real fortune is not in earthly things at all. Job emerges from his experiences with a deepened knowledge of God, and with an enlargement of soul, which made him twice the man he was before. Tears have cleansed his eyes from the dust of self-esteem. Sorrow has quickened his intuition and sympathy. Clouds have emptied themselves in fructifying rain. The passing of earthly things has brought within nearer focus the saving vision of the Permanent. All these are the real enrichment of life. For possessions to be of value must be as immortal as their possessor. Only that which man can take into Eternity with him is of real worth.

The whole of this wonderful story is an illustration and intimation of the good things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Whatever Heaven will mean to us, it cannot mean less than the renewal of every gift now but partially appreciated, the expansion of every capacity now inadequate to the attainment of our ideals, the rekindling of every light of love which shone here only to be extinguished, and the fresh opportunity for every lost cause, every unfinished service, and every incomplete consecration in which our lives have been involved. Let us then march boldly through the night of doubt and sorrow. For the morning cometh.

His delight is in the law of the Lord.

THIS is the comprehensive description of the true believer. His actions are controlled by a single purpose which unifies his life. He has enthroned God as Lord in his heart. His love is the support of his faith and the very breath of his life. God's law has ceased to be irksome and has become the joy of his heart. For it is the expression of His affection and care. It is no arbitrary code of prohibition and precept but the unfolding of a Will which is all wisdom and all kindness. It holds him in silken chains which are yet stronger than steel. It is cordial to his heart, strength to his arm, and speed to his feet. It satisfies his every instinct, and delivers him from every lower love and purpose.

Such an one does not find it hard to separate himself from the counsel of the ungodly, and to deny himself the pleasure that offers in the way of sinners. Consecration to the high purpose of obedience for ever settles the question of friendship with the world. It is sheer impossibility to delight at the same time in the Law of the Lord and in the doubtful and sinful things in which those whose backs are toward Him find their life. And what begins as a deliberate act becomes an instinctive and natural attitude to him whose every experience is of the goodness of his Lord. His thoughts circle unbidden around His Law, and his feet find His paths almost without search. Blessed indeed is that man! Everything which the Psalmists subsequently declare of God's goodness is simply the expansion of this opening benediction.

Ask of me.

BASED upon the assurance of sonship is that of inheritance. God encourages those who are His children to claim from Him that to which their relationship gives them title. To plead His promises, therefore, is not to be regarded in any sense as an overcoming of His reluctance but rather as a laying hold of His Covenant. This is the true nature of all prayer, both in the Psalmist's experience and in His Whom he saw but dimly afar off and yet proclaimed so clearly. For it is with the coming Messiah that God first of all makes this Covenant. He it is to Whom by virtue of His filial obedience, even unto death, all power is given in Heaven and on earth. To Christ only does this promise of world-wide dominion apply in its fulness. He alone merits the world's throne Who redeemed us unto God by His blood. What the Psalmist saw in shadow we see in unclouded light. To him it was but a vague hope. To us it is light, and life, and fire of love.

For in Christ Jesus we too are made the sons of God and share the very privilege that is His. To us access into the Holiest has been given, and we too may ask of the Father what we will in His Name. Let us not forget, however, that like His our prayer must often be sacrificial. It was by the Cross that Christ voiced His supplication and gained His empire. Our prayers, too, must frequently rise from a lonely Garden and a Green Hill. But we pray there not alone, as He did. We are not forsaken in our intercession, as He was. For, as we pray, He is our Companion.

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people.

FEARLESSNESS is the fruit of faith. The child of God who really knows Him has no cause to be afraid of the threatenings of his foes. For since his life is linked for ever with the interests of God's Kingdom, nothing which concerns him can be without interest to the Lord. His enemies are the Lord's enemies. Nor will He suffer them to prevail over His servant, nor thwart the main purpose of his life. It was well said of one man, whose life was made a blessing to many, that he feared man so little because he feared God so much ! The larger loyalty to which he was irrevocably committed made timorous shrinking impossible. And thus it ever is with those to whom God is a reality.

For the life of faith is one of inevitable conflict. No man can be identified with the things of God without calling down upon himself the opposition, and even the hatred, of those who oppose His work in the world. No flowery path has been promised to His children. No freedom from anxiety, and no immunity from conflict is part of their inheritance. Yet the end of the way is so certain, and the abiding companionship of the Lord so real, that none can hold back. Foes may be near, but He is nearer and greater far. We may challenge every opposition in the certainty that He will crown our courage with victory. But our confidence is only authenticated when it has no admixture of self-trust. Bravado is not bravery. Courage is rooted deep in the faith of God.

Commune with your own heart . . . and be still.

WE do not really know ourselves until we see us in the light of God. Communion with Him is an illumination of our nature and tendencies which would stagger us, did it not, at the same time, convince us of His cleansing and transforming power. Every man is a mystery to himself; so unexpected are the latent insincerities and disloyalties of the soul. It is on this account that many an one is surprised into conduct of which he has always felt himself incapable. Crises come upon us without warning, when choice must immediately be made with issues which reach further than mind can measure. In such hours we all act instinctively, and the hidden man of the heart is revealed. The history of many a moral and spiritual tragedy is the history of one who did not know himself, and who, hence, had not made the Lord his defence, his strength, and his shield.

It is well therefore that we should be sincere and frequent in our self-examination. We are all prone to take too much for granted in regard to ourselves, and to imagine that all is well with us; when, all the time, there sleeps within us an untamed beast whose savagery may be aroused at any moment to destroy not only our own good but the good of others also. If in the quiet and light of the Sanctuary we look into our own hearts, and are honest with ourselves, we shall not fail so to commit us to the Lord, and to submit us to His redeeming discipline, as to prepare ourselves to meet the tests of life and passion worthily.

Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies.

THE Psalmist's concern is that he should avoid the destructive wiles of his foes, and should at the same time witness to them convincingly of the Lord Whom he serves. Hence his prayer that God will take hold of his life and lead his unresisting will in paths of His choice. For none but God can really see the snares which are spread for the feet of His servants. Their foe is altogether too elusive for them, but not for Him. What came as a surprise to the unwary pilgrim and overthrew him, has not for a moment been hidden from the watchful eye of his Lord. Had he been but walking in sensitive dependence upon His guidance, and in deliberate care for His precepts, the disaster would not have overtaken him. For it is along the pathway of His choice alone that His power and deliverance may be at all times claimed and realized.

Mere victory over the attempts and assaults of the foe is by no means the whole of Christian duty. We do not fulfil our calling by anything less than a witness to the reality of the grace wherein we stand, to those who, on all sides, watch lives of professed faith. We do not glorify God merely by avoiding defeat. We must so state the case for Him that He shall come to be admired in us, and our lives become channels of His blessing to the world. And the secret of such an abundant life is to be found in our constant submission to the guiding hand of our Lord. When He is in undisputed control all essential inspiration and strength is at hand.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak.

THIS is the prayer of a man who is entirely confident of the nature of the Lord. It is an appeal for forgiveness on the part of one who detects himself in wrongdoing, on the ground of his own weakness. He knows that "like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame." It voices a convinced trust in the Lord's generousness, Who takes all things into account in His judgment of His children. Men may pass entirely mistaken judgments, and utter censorious condemnation of one who disappoints them, only because they are unable rightly to estimate all the elements of force and weakness which enter into the tragedy. God's judgment is always according to truth. The hidden weakness of soul, whether part of our ancestry or the outcome of wilful transgression in former thoughtless days, is open to His sight. And as He sees He sympathizes.

How safe we are in thus casting ourselves upon Him, whatever be the fault which has besmirched our souls and beclouded our outlook! For His nature is unchangeable, and we may always rely with confidence upon His perfect understanding and generous estimate. Moreover, His mercy toward all His family of weaklings has been eternally expressed in Christ, Who, "when we were yet without strength," died for us. Nothing is more certain than the forgiveness and renewal of all who cry to Him thus, from whatever depth of self-shame. Thus is the darkness and shadow of death turned into the light of a morning without clouds.

The Lord shall judge the people ; judge me, O Lord.

THERE is deep satisfaction in the knowledge that our foes are the Lord's care. We may safely leave them to his judgment Who never fails to vindicate those whose cause is committed to Him. But, lest this fact should generate anything like self-complacency, it is always well that we see in them a mirror of ourselves. While suffering from their enmity it may be, and committing their judgment to Him, we must not forget that we too need to pass our lives under His review. Otherwise we are like to become unconscious hypocrites, deceiving not others but our own selves. For we too have fallen short of His glory and merited His disfavour, and our responsibility is greater because of our knowledge and privilege. It is indeed only by thus constantly bringing ourselves to the test of His light and truth that our true life progresses.

Nothing is of greater protective influence than the consciousness that the doings of every day and hour must be brought under survey of Him we seek to serve. To cultivate this consciousness will save us from many a careless word and thoughtless act, from many a wilful choice and unworthy purpose. For we cannot light-heartedly walk in paths which lead to the Judgment Seat, else indeed is our profession of faith vain and our life empty. And each evening is the Judgment Seat erected for the trial of the day's doings. There He sits Who bought us with His blood, and Whose eyes are as a flame of fire. But His throne is a throne of grace.

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?

IN comparison with the greatness of the universe, created by God's power and upheld by His faithfulness, the insignificance of man is vividly brought home to us all. Measured against the world's greatness, how small does man appear. His concerns—which loom so large in importance before his own eyes, are seen to be merest trivialities in comparison with the vast designs of God. And none can look life thus in the face without being awed at the majesty and condescension of God. For the God Who keeps the stars in their courses, and holds the waters in the hollow of His hand, is the God Who surrounds His children with infinite mercy and unfailing tenderness. It is this which makes even the smallness of our lives great—that God cares about us and takes pleasure in our ways.

It is clearly written in the history of every Christian life that He has been mindful of us. Long before our thoughts were turned toward Him He planned our well-being. When we had no interest in His claims His thought was of our needs. While we wandered far from the pathway of His commandments into the devious ways of self-will and sin, He followed us in mercy which was at once restraining and constraining. And when in faithlessness we forgot His Covenant, and did not keep in mind our own professions, He remembered us and guided us from our own folly. And all this His mindful care is still ours to-day. It is at once our wonderment and our security that, amid the greatness of His doings, He finds place for our feebleness. His measure of the worth of man's life is the constancy of His thought.

They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.

TO know God is to love Him, and to love Him is to confide in Him. His Name denotes His eternal faithfulness, of which the record of the life of His people in all ages is the attestation. None have ever known Him deny their search nor betray their confidence. The history of His persistent goodness is the long story of a nation's life in which He has been tested again and again and has never failed. Love less divine than His had broken down under the frequent infidelity and contumacy to which it was subjected. That it did not, is now the confidence of every believer. That He has fulfilled to Israel the promise of His Name, is their warrant for confiding to Him their interests, their fears, and their highest aims. And their faith finds its justification and its development in the answering experience.

We do not really trust in God so long as there is a lingering remnant of self-confidence and sufficiency to which we cling. While we are in any degree reliant upon aught that we have, or are, or do, we avow our independence of His aid. When, knowing ourselves to have no goodness, no strength, and no resources, we cast us wholly upon His promise, then it is that we trust Him. And trusting, we find Him entirely true. Then faith's energy is not directed toward any self-commendation, but always toward obedient co-operation with Him in the work of blessing a redeemed world. To trust in Him is to toil with Him, always with the certainty that the labour is not in vain. For He works in and through the life whose whole reliance is Heavenward. Nor do we know the Name of Jesus, save by ear, unless such is our trust through Him to Godward.

Thou art the Helper of the fatherless.

BESET by the hostility of his foes, and perplexed by the success of the wicked, the Psalmist finds his only refuge in God. From the frowning threats of those who would destroy him he turns Heavenward to Him Whose love has never yet proved untrustworthy. In a world where the clash of conflicting self-interests makes perpetual warfare, and where each man's hand is lifted against his brother, he feels himself an orphaned soul. Yet with all the instinct which cries not for things holy and true, which is part of his nature, he calls upon God. And it is thus that he finds Him. His Fatherliness meets his deep need. The provision of His house satisfies his every want. Beneath the defences of His power he is saved from all threatening.

What the Psalmist saw but dimly, Christ has made for ever clear—that God is indeed our Father and that we are His children. None can care as He does, for none so fully understands the varied needs of our nature. The task of life which confronts us has been carefully weighed and planned by Him. He knows to the last ounce the strain it imposes and the many questionings it arouses. Hence the certainty and sufficiency of His help to reinforce all our efforts. As Father He lays upon Himself the obligation of being ever available to those who call upon Him. And He lays upon us the commission of a life to which no one is ever called apart from His sustaining grace. Having no other arm to lean upon but His, we soon discover that we need none other.

The Lord trieth the righteous.

IT is of all things most strange that He Who knows us so intimately should yet subject us to trial, as though to discover the quality of our faith and steadfastness. That He does so, however, is the common experience of all His children. And since He is the God of all love, we conclude that this His ministry of test is for our immediate and ultimate good. For it is not directed toward enlightening Him about us, but to our own self-discovery. He knows full well what is in us; but we ourselves only come to know our own nature thus. He permits the fiery trial which reveals our ill-tempers and moral disorders, much as the refiner of metals passes the precious ore through the fire in order to bring out the dross. Under the trials and discipline of this Divine ministry we are brought to self-consciousness, and thence to confession and to the appropriation of cleansing and re-creating grace, as were in no other way possible.

One of the great dangers of life is that of looking upon second causes as though they are all-important. The failure of affection, or fortune, or health, the perversity of one with whom our interests are bound up, the breakdown of plans owing to unexpected opposition, and the like, are apt in turn to create resentment against mere human instruments. If we always remember that behind all such agencies and second causes is the controlling Will of unerring Wisdom and unfailing Love, how much we should be saved ! For it is the Lord Himself, and He alone, Who plans the things that try us.

Now will I arise, saith the Lord.

WHEN men have learned to confide in God, they find themselves possessors of a way of escape in every danger which threatens their overthrow. None ever yet avoided tribulation who sought to be true to the ideals and precepts of His Word. Faith in Him is in fact a self-commitment to opposition, so inevitable is the raging of His foes against His people. And it sometimes appears as though the enemies were invincible. Day by day seems but to bring increased force to their plotting. The patience of the child of God who cries for deliverance, and yet does not question the rightness of God's delay, is often strained to the utmost. But God is never one second too late. He arises for the defence and deliverance of His own just at the right moment. And be it never forgotten that He is the best judge as to which moment is the right one.

If we would but "quietly wait for the salvation of God," setting ourselves in the way of His commandments, and meanwhile doing His Will persistently with the utmost fulness of our powers, we should oftener be found singing the song of the redeemed. In the fourth watch of the night, when all is blackest and most hopeless, Jesus Himself still arises to fill the hour of His disciples' need with the glow of a great deliverance. And, late though the hour, He has never yet been too late. Let us take courage, then, however hardly pressed. For long ere we get to our extremity we shall hear him say: "Now will I arise."

Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

THIS is the prayer of a man who realizes something of the danger of life. He knows what it is to be over-weary and to be almost overcome by drowsiness. And he knows, too, that for a pilgrim to be sleeping in the enemy's territory means destruction. Surely this is a prayer we all do well to make our own. For there are times in every life when the easiest thing would be to relax all vigilance, to slacken all moral endeavour, and just to seek our ease in the things of the world. Its couch is soft and seductive, and we are so tired of the incessant struggle. But be sure of this, that to sleep here is the sleep of death, as many an one has found to his cost.

There is an influence in the world which constantly tends to dull spiritual perceptions and to enervate moral energies. Insidiously it creeps over men, benumbing their senses until hands once busy in Christ's service now hang down slackly, lips once filled with His praise are now found to be babbling strange things as when a man talks in his sleep, hearts which once beat warmly in sympathy with His aims are now utterly indifferent. They have been overcome by sleep because, somehow, they failed to keep in view the Great Vision. God would thereby have enlightened their eyes until the end of time had they continued to look to Him. But herein was their failure; and herein is our warning. For the deadly peril is one which assails every one of us. And to be careless of the danger is simply to court the uttermost disaster.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

IT is not the intellectually weak man who speaks thus, but the morally perverse. This is not the conclusion of reasoned argument so much as the desire of an untamed heart. It is the reckless boast of one who determines to rid himself of all the restrictions of God's law, and to cast aside its prohibitions and sanctions. Looking out upon life's prospect, with its fair promises of things which he knows instinctively are contradictory to God's claim, he cries, "No God for me!" And he sets out to live in a God-excluded world which, for a while, rewards his recklessness; but later to be surely overtaken by the Nemesis of his folly. For such an one finds, when he would seek God, that in his world He cannot be come at.

Less blatant, but not less deadly, is the folly of those who, while conventionally subscribing to the belief of God's existence, virtually live as though He were not. Their whole interests are on the natural and material planes. "God is not in all their thoughts." They plan for themselves as though He exercised no oversight of men's lives. The reins of government are in their own hands; and only when things get out of hand do they shamefacedly turn to Him with belated request for help. The folly of all such is that they are bartering the true riches of His fellowship for the gaudy tinsel and perishing glory of things which are soon outlived. We are only "wise unto salvation" when we give Him pre-eminence in all things.

He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

THE Psalmist here answers his own question as to the conditions of abiding fellowship with the Lord. That the House of God is open, and the Holy Hill accessible to His people, he is already aware. But how may the privilege of life there be entered upon and maintained? It is instructive to learn how practical are the virtues which constitute correspondence with the Lord and make fellowship possible. They have to do with an upright walk, with works that are righteous, with truthful lips, with a tongue not given to slander. They comprise also a relationship with men which is based upon moral considerations and fulfilled by unselfish sincerity. Those who seriously set themselves to live thus, find their native atmosphere in the secret place of the Most High. Their quality is at once a condition and an outcome of their union with God.

While the sweetest note in the Evangel is that which declares an unconditioned welcome to all who come to Christ, we must not forget that it sets up a compelling imperative also to worthy living. No man can company with Christ for long whose ways do not harmonize with His. To abide in Him clearly necessitates the putting away of all that contradicts His nature, and the bending of every energy to the perfecting of holiness in His fear. They who seek to walk thus in the way of His steps find themselves wonderfully strengthened for the fulfilment of His requirements. And firmly established in His grace, they become steadfast and unmovable.

PSALM xvi. 5.

The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.

THE Psalmist has come to know God alike in the outward correspondences and in the inward strengthening of life. He accepts the fact that God has ordered all his outward circumstances, and so in them he finds Him. This is the secret of the heart at rest. For if duty be irksome it is His service ; if the outlook is dark, the Lord is still there as the true light ; if enemies are near, He is still nearer ; if the pressure of poverty is felt, the unsearchable riches are also at hand. And the whole range of life is a sphere of service for Him. To be where we are, in the consciousness of the Will and appointment of God, takes all the harshness and sting out of our environment, and inspires this praiseful song. At times we may become faint-hearted, and even ask Him to change our lot. But the conviction when our request is denied that He maintains that same lot for His own glory and our highest well-being, makes us glad to trust Him.

Not only are the circumstances of life lovingly ordered, but the strengthening cup is likewise the Lord's gift to us. We may sometimes imagine it to be over-bitter ; but its bitterness is tonic. For our true sustenance does not consist of honied delights. The chalice from which we drink is mixed by the Lord with full knowledge and deliberate purpose, and is always "the cup of salvation." This is our enduement for worthy life in the prescribed inheritance. It is the Lord's enablement for the fulfilment of His appointment. He does not bid us live on any native strength of our own, but graciously provides us with every sufficiency for the doing of His Will. Should we not, then, drink deep and oft of this cordial cup ? Only so can we worthily possess the inheritance and fulfil its obligations.

Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.

THE child of God, however rich his experience of His mercy, is never lifted beyond the need of daily upholding. The man who imagines himself able to stand is always in real danger of a fall. For the enmities in his own nature, and in the world around, are altogether too many for the unaided moral resources of the strongest. Unwary feet find the pathway slippery and full of snares, and only he is safe whose hand is tightly held in the ever-ready grip of Almighty love and power. It must be borne in mind, however, that it is only as we walk in His paths that we can claim His protection. When, in defiant self-will, we forsake the Way of Righteousness for the flowered meadows of worldly pleasure and selfish sin, we forfeit all claim upon His grace, at any rate for the time being. It is only with "conscience void of offence toward God and man" that we can offer such a prayer as this in the full certainty of His transcendent answer.

Self-confidence is the foe of spiritual progress. We are never so near to the peril of utter shipwreck as when we foolishly imagine that we can dispense with the guidance and strength of Christ's companionship. Life has a way of unerringly finding us out; and it is in the place of our fancied strength that our actual weakness is always discovered. How the enemy triumphs when those who name His Name fall, and, falling, drag the standard of the Faith in the mire! And yet we need not fear his wiles if we are living in the spirit of this prayer.

He made darkness His secret place.

IT is an erroneous idea which concludes that the darkness which at times settles down upon the soul is inevitably the result of sin. Sometimes it is, as we each know to our bitter regret. But it is not always so. There is for us, as for Moses, "the thick darkness where God was," and we are often called thither to gain a revelation of Him which would not have been possible to us in the light. When all things are black around us, and when no gleam seems to pierce the gloom, faith may always challenge the darkness and find God at its heart. For He is the ultimate solution of all our inexplicable things. Life is little short of tragedy to those who can see nothing beyond their calamities, the denial of their hopes, and the confirmation of their fears. For God fulfils Himself in many ways, and not infrequently by frustrating our ill-conceived aims and by blotting out every light but the true.

How blessed it is to know that in our experiences of darkness, in which we cannot see His face, we may yet hold His hand and feel its pressure. He can come nearer to us in the darkness than we have ever let Him come in the light. He does not always permit us to see the end of the way, but He does give us light enough to enable us to take the next step in faith and loyalty. And one day all the darkness shall have gone for ever, and we shall see Him face to face. Then we shall know that it was in our dark nights we were most surely fashioned for the glad service of endless days.

Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.

PART of the process of the Christian life is the constant discovery we make regarding ourselves. To the maxim of the old philosophy and the new motto of the new psychology—"man know thyself," the reply of the God-awakened soul is—"Who can?" It is true that "the Lord knoweth them that are His"; but it is equally true that they do not know themselves, save as they walk in His light. Then, however, unsuspected heights and depths, strange loyalties and disloyalties, interwoven opposites, conflicting ideals and inclinations, are all brought to view. Our secret faults work to the surface; and the hour of self-discovery is the hour for contrite prayer. For the God Who reveals is none other than the God Who removes the thing confessed. According to our self-consciousness we cry to Him. And He answers according to His mighty power, which goes beyond all we have conceived.

For not only does He clear us of actual guilt, but cleanses also from every contracted stain. Forgiveness becomes a positive regenerating force. Pardon is an inspiration to penitence. Assurance gives birth to new aspirations. Mercy fills life with new majesty. His gracious intervention quickens every moral intuition. The Blood of the Covenant and the Fire of the Spirit, which cleanse the hidden man of the heart, evoke a responsive consecration which becomes the dominant impulse of life. Thus are men brought out of the darkness of sin into the glorious light of true life.

PSALM XX. 5.

In the Name of our God we will set up our banners.

A SPIRIT of militancy is born in all those who come into fellowship with God. For He is unresting energy in the presence of evil, and those who company with Him partake of His Spirit. He has lifted up an ensign to the people, a banner displayed because of the truth. It declares a challenge against all that is unholy and destructive of man's highest good. And the whole record of His doings among men is that of a Man of War. It rings with the clash of conflict and the peal of victory. The expectation to which it directs the faith of His people in every age is of ultimate triumph over every enmity. Is it strange then, that those who company with Him, should themselves partake of the warrior-spirit, and set up their banners in His Name? Surely His Church is not an establishment but an encampment. His people are, every one of them, the willing soldiers of Jesus Christ.

If at any time we are beguiled into setting up banners in the strength of our own resources, emblazoned with our own name, we merely court disaster. The Christian who goes out upon any warfare at his own charges has already pre-determined the issue. The enemy cares naught for us, and laughs at both our strategy and our strength. We are altogether incompetent for fighting even the smallest battle for truth, and purity, and righteousness, however well-intentioned our effort. It is only at the Name of Jesus that "Satan's host doth flee." And it is given to each of us to set up our banners of battle in that Name.

Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.

THOSE who watch life carefully realize increasingly that God goes before them, and that not one step of the journey takes them along an untrodden or unprepared pathway. His personal care for each member of His family is the great glory of His Fatherliness. Herein is our confidence in going forward to the duty of every day. What is mystery to us is history to Him. A thousand ills have been removed from our way and replaced by a thousand blessings, which too often we take as a mere matter of course. Disguised under the form of common gifts, God's goodness lies all around us. Did we but know it, these ordinary things are angels in homespun. Life, even the hardest life, is lifted from the commonplace and sanctified for ever by the fact that He has gone before. With what gladness then should we hail each day, since Eternal Love has planned all its experiences and furnished all its need!

It was thus that Jesus lived, in unbroken realization that His life was planned by the Father. This faith supported Him during all the testing experiences which confronted Him as He moved forward. Nothing came amiss; and, in unlooked-for ways and places, He found evidences of the goodness which had gone before. Here it was a woman's love, a child's faith, a man's courage, a boy's gift, and anon a thief's penitence. However hard the way He found a running brook close at hand, from whence He drank and lifted up His head with joy. For it was opened for Him by prevenient goodness. So, too, can we look upon life and find it always good. For we, too, are children of the same Father.

PSALM xxii. 25.

I will pay my vows before them that fear Him.

AT once personal, national, and predictive, this psalm is both a record of experience and of hope. Its ultimate fulfilment is to be found only in Jesus Christ, Who strengthened His soul upon its assurances in the last dread conflict, and Who, as none other, has fulfilled its every declaration of high purpose. In his own feeble way the Psalmist himself knew something of suffering and anguish, and experienced also the common tribulation of the nation. He had known what it meant to be—as it seemed—forsaken of God, stripped of his beauty, and despoiled of his strength. He knew too what it was to cry unto Him, and to be saved, as it were, from the very mouth of the lion. His mourning had been turned into rejoicing, and his complaint into testimony.

How often do we fall short in this very thing ! Brought low that we may know ourselves, and uplifted thence that we may know Him, we are prone to forget the resolutions and promises of our dark days. Not that God makes any bargain with His people. His mercy is beyond price. His favour cannot be purchased. Yet it sets up a claim upon our lives which only the utmost consecration can ever discharge. It is just here that many fail. Delivered from their fears, they are positively dishonest in withholding from the Lord what is His due. And acting thus they unconsciously leave the pathway of Christ, Who has given us an example in this very thing, that we should follow His steps. For how full was His consecration and how complete His obedience.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

THIS, the sweetest of all the psalms, is the most comprehensive of human life and its varied needs. It is the idyll of a heart which has found its rest in God. Want, distress, perplexity, weariness, fear, have all come to an end ; for He has brought an assurance which checks their power to distress. So deep is the certainty that though circumstances may change He cannot fail, that the whole stretch of life seems to be—and actually is—already freed from all foreboding. The sheep may rest in the Shepherd's care, the child in the Father's love. Since all days are alike to Him, he can hence look forward without any apprehension to all that lies ahead.

Well do we know, even with our limited experience of life, how outward things change from day to day. In every life there are days bright and dark, gloomy and joyful. There are days which stand out for the gladness they bring, and days, too, whose remembrance still strikes chill to the heart. In this respect the future is certain to be as the past. Yet is not the confidence of those who rely upon God at all ruffled. He holds the secret of every day. With its needs will come His grace, with its burden His strength, with its challenge His peace, and with its sin the goodness and mercy which forgives. And faith can look yet further—even to the last day of all, when earth is receding and things long-loved are relaxing their hold. For, most surely of all, on that day goodness and mercy shall be at hand, like the King's ferrymen, to carry the pilgrim across to Immanuel's land.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

THIS declaration of God's absolute sovereignty, based upon his creative and upholding power, is the first note in the scale of a grand ascent. It begins on earth and ends at the Throne. He is the Lord of all, Who of His own Will calls men into fellowship with Himself Who makes it possible for them to rise. All their experiences of ascending "into the hill of the Lord" and of standing "in His holy place" follow upon their acknowledgment of His Lordship. This is at once their confidence and their strength for the fulfilment of the conditions of drawing near to Him. It is significant that while the earth is His, He calls men from it to dwell on High. Their place in the world is by no means permanent. He gives no freehold possession to any. The terms and tenure of every man's lease of life are determined by His love and wisdom. None can call anything he has his own.

Nothing interferes with our growth in the knowledge of the Lord—which is true life—like an over-strong hold of the earth and its belongings. When men come to look upon things as their own, and to order their lives in the present and future according to such idea, they do not readily respond to the upward calling. For strangely and subtly these fancied possessions of ours have a way of becoming our possessors; and of all perils this is to be most watchfully avoided. The fact that all is His, and that we are here but for a day, will save us from the disastrous choices which ultimately imprison the souls of men.

Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me . . . on Thee
do I wait all the day.

THE man who prays for God's guidance in the affairs of life avows himself willing to be led. If his prayer be sincere he relinquishes all idea of self-planning and renounces all worldly standards of value. He prays thus because he has somehow learned something of the folly and vanity of a God-excluded life, and something of its peril also. After walking in paths which proved deceptive in their fairness, he is now willing to walk in God's truth, knowing well that though the way be narrow it is safe, and that it leads Homeward. And his prayer is supported by countless promises of the Lord to enter into fellowship with him and to be the Guardian of his days. Wise indeed unto salvation is the man who trustfully commits his way unto the Lord, with a determination at all costs to follow the guiding light and cling to the upholding hand.

God does not lead men by putting into their hands a map of the whole of life with the road clearly marked, and leaving them to pursue their course by its direction. To do so would be to expose us to dangers to which we should inevitably fall victims. Rather does He walk with us, causing the path to open before us as we go together a step at a time. Hence we must wait upon Him all the day. Any of its ordinary hours may hold for us the great crisis of life. So unexpectedly do high issues confront us. And as we wait upon Him—wonderful truth—He waits upon us!

But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity.

INDEPENDENCE is always necessary to integrity. The world is full of folk who are content to go with the crowd, surrendering themselves to its wayward impulses, and fearing to be at variance with its often senseless and, not infrequently, sinful aims. The men who, having had a vision of eternal things, are able to stand out and declare boldly "as for me," have in every age been few. But they are the truly great men in the sight of Heaven and earth. Their individual hold upon the things that really matter has made them careless of earth's pitiful applause. The approving voice of God has been more to them than all the blame or praise of men. In their determination to stand alone with Him if need be, they have become the lights of the world. Such men never die. Theirs is the immortality, amid the decay of all things mortal, of those who do the Will of God. Their influence is an abiding reality in a world which, with its lusts, passeth away.

The necessity for this heroism of faith is by no means confined to the great and public spheres of action. Every believer, however obscure his circumstances or seemingly small his opportunity of witness, must adopt this as the controlling attitude of his life if he would fulfil his calling. Not that it is ever easy to be in opposition to the established order of things. But when conviction grips the soul it cannot be trifled with, lest its strength is lost. And he who stands for God, deliberately choosing to be misunderstood rather than deny his deepest faith, stands with God also.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.

SINGLENESSE of aim is part of the strength of the believer's life. The trouble with many of us is that we are seeking after too many things, and that only an infrequent overplus of moral energy is available for what should be our supreme quest. Consequently our efforts are half-hearted, and our attainments in holiness and service both meagre and unworthy. It is mainly by reason of a false scale of values that we fail to devote ourselves entirely to the Will of God. We do not recognize that herein lies our highest good and the only possibility of our useful service. We do not realize that, in comparison, everything else in life is disappointment and not worth its cost. For when the highest is seen the utmost is readily sacrificed for its acquisition. And when it is understood that every other interest of life is closely bound up with this one thing, then it gets the chief place in our desires. The proper adjustment of life's energies is, after all, mainly a matter of vision.

It is not enough merely to desire the supreme things. They must be sought after. No man by merely taking thought can add one cubit to his stature. Desires must be expressed in deeds. The importance of the issue demands that it supersedes every other pursuit. Christ has left us in no doubt as to the primacy of the Kingdom. "Seek ye first" is His abiding direction. "Thou hast left thy first love" is His scathing condemnation of a life in which the interference of other things is tolerated. And above all, in His own example He has shown of what a life on these lines really consists.

Be not silent to me.

WHEN one has learned to know the voice of God, life holds no greater calamity than His silence. That He should not speak to the heart of His child for his support and guidance is unthinkable on any other ground than that of love's discipline. If communion with Him is interrupted His silence is an indication of sin. It is His way of calling attention to some wilful departure from the implicates of fellowship. Nor does he leave the sincere soul in any doubt as to what has made the communion of other days impossible. And how sweet is His voice of forgiveness to the penitent ! And how readily is the old intimacy renewed, on His part, when we have, on ours, resolved to deal with the thing which has grieved Him !

Nothing is more striking in the life of Christ than His silence. There was, for instance, the silence which searched the soul of the Gentile woman who sought the healing of her daughter. It tested the sincerity of her desire and the quality of her faith, and neither was found wanting. And there were His silences before the chief priests and their false witnesses, and before Herod and Pilate, which condemned their insincerity and perversity. In the case of Herod, at least, whose continued sinful indulgence in defiance of God and conscience had vitiated all his springs of thought, He did not speak because there was nothing to appeal to. Herod would not understand, so Christ was silent. For the plain fact is that men put themselves far out of range of His voice by their own moral attitude toward Him. Such silence as then enwraps them is the silence of death. Let us then regard any cessation of the Lord's speech toward us as a moral warning.

The Lord will give strength unto His people.

THIS is the conclusion of one who has come to know, not only something of God's resource but something of His nature. That He is all powerful is self-evident. That He is full of Fatherly kindness and solicitude is a revelation from Heaven. Of the God Who creates, all men have some sort of knowledge. The God Who is ever giving to the need of His children is only known to those who draw near to Him with a full purpose of heart—as we all may. For Christ has fully revealed what the Psalmist only saw in dim vision. From Him we have learned that God gives strength to His people, just because it is His nature to impart Himself, and because life is altogether too big for us apart from His enduements. Weakness is no disqualification, but rather sets up a claim which He cannot deny. It is part of the record of the Kingdom that all its members “out of weakness were made strong.”

What an assurance is this to those who are confronted by frowning duty and fearful demand. Conscious that in ourselves we have no might, we may well fear for the coming day, as we set out upon its task and conflict, were it not for this assurance. “The Lord will give strength unto His people” in exact proportion to the burden He has also given them to bear, the duty He has given them to perform, and the contest to which He sends them forth. He knows our need to the last ounce, and we may safely trust Him for its supply if we are really living in the way of His commandments.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

IT is well to remember that all our troubles are transitory and that our present experience of sorrow will pass. The tears of the believer, however caused, will surely one day be wiped away by the Lord's own hand. Indeed, even here and now He makes a rainbow of them like unto that which encircles His Throne. And thus we have in ourselves a prophecy the fulfilment of which is one of the great inspirations of our pilgrimage. Every night of sorrow is a measured span. Even though in our grief we may imagine that the hours are standing still and that the darkness will never pass, yet the earth is rolling onward into light; and in the morning we see things clearer, and find mitigation of our sorrow in the sunshine. So it will ever be in regard to all earth's tears. There comes a day when every cause of weeping will be for ever at an end. We shall see that not one thing has been accidental; and in our joy we shall sing of Him Who hath done all things well.

We are tempted sometimes to think that the Lord delayeth His Coming, and to wonder if perchance we have been building our hopes upon some cunningly-devised fable. The world seems to need Him so much; for its ills can never be set right until He appears. The times seem to be out of joint, though really they are not. For He "is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness." Tear-dimmed eyes can even now discern the signs of His Appearing in the heavens. Let us gird ourselves with patience, and lift up our heads to greet the joy that is surely coming in the Morning.

My times are in Thy hand.

IN days of trouble and uncertainty, surrounded as he was by threatening and disturbance, the Psalmist is yet able to realize God as being over all, and to summon his soul to triumphant faith in Him. Despite every menace, he is at rest in the sure confidence that nothing can happen to him by chance; for he is in God's care. And his experience is a mirror of our lives also. For under the stress of unwonted circumstances of anxiety and sorrow, whether solitary or shared, we are all apt to imagine that things have somehow got out of hand, that evil is in an unassailable ascendancy, and that God has abrogated His right of government or has become negligent in His thought of us. As a plain matter of fact, all that concerns the life of His children—their times—are in His hand. If we can only retain this confidence and venture out upon His faithfulness, we shall be saved from all the evils that follow in the train of faithless pessimism.

How complete is that union: "My times . . . Thy hand." It is a conjunction of weakness and Omnipotence, of changefulness and Permanence, of fearfulness and Omniscience. Our times are not in the grip of some remorseless law of cause and consequence, but in the nail-pierced Hand of love and mercy and power which can remake every vessel marred upon the wheels, reverse every force of evil, and renew life into holiness and victory. And how complete is the resultant blessing. For from His hand can come no duty without its dynamic, no sorrow without its strength, no call without its upholding constraint, and no cross without its necessary courage.

I will guide thee with Mine eye.

AS men company with the Lord, yielding themselves to His direction, they acquire a growing consciousness of their need of guidance. For life's circumstances are constantly re-forming in strange and unexpected combinations which test the believer's faith and courage to the utmost. Questions arise which cannot be solved by mere reference to the past. Steps must be taken in emergencies upon which former experience casts no steady light. And while each day is the product of the past, it is also the parent of the future ; so that the importance of its issues demands nothing less than the certain guidance of God, to Whom past and future alike are an open page. What confidence does such a promise as this inspire, declaring as it does that we are not left to find out our own way through earth's perplexing mazes !

While it is His part to guide us, it is ours both to seek that guidance and to follow it when declared. Light only follows upon obedience to already received light. We cannot hope to obey God in a crisis if we live as we please in ordinary days. Any such attempt only brings darkness in that hour when the light is most desired. In guidance by God's eye is something far other than the compulsion of His power expressed in the arrangement of circumstances too strong for us. It suggests a sympathetic correspondence in which we come to understand His glance and to interpret both smile and shadow upon His face. And that correspondence is nothing less than love's quick intuition,—the soul's response to His redeeming love.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

FROM the national experience of God's care this evangel of the nations is distilled. From the day when His choice was set upon Israel for His own inheritance His care has never wavered. Through all the vicissitudes and strange variations of fortune, caused in greatest part by its own fluctuations of faith and fealty, the nation has been protected and preserved. God's covenant has never—from His side—been broken. Not a word has failed of His good promise. He has been a refuge and strength to kings and people alike. National deliverances have been wrought under his directing and strengthening hand in such a way as that the entire history of the people is inextricably bound up with His doings. This then is the nation's testimony to Him Who is not only the God of persons but of peoples also. The true well-being of every earthly kingdom is only to be secured by His enthronement as LORD.

We are apt to overlook the fact of God's claims upon the nation, as though these were of lesser importance than His claims upon the individual life. In reality they are closely related. For the nation is but an aggregation of units, a chain of many links. The personal religion of each one of us has a share in determining the quality of the nation. The place given to His House, the reverence accorded to His Day, and the obedience rendered to His Word—which together form the expression of a nation's faith—is the product of personal fidelity on the part of all who, in the nation, call Him Lord. Are we thus seeking to elevate the life of our land, and to enthrone in her counsels the King of kings?

There is no want to them that fear Him.

DID we really believe this Word, our anxieties would all be at an end. For what is there to be anxious about when all the resources of God are at our disposal? It is only when we exclude Him from our conceptions of duty and obligation that we fail also to realize the amplitude of His rich provision. The pathway and the power, the task and the strength, the need and the supply, are indissolubly connected since He is the Author of all our ways. Circumstances may sometimes appear to contradict this, and our faith may sometimes be strained by long waiting ; but there is no record of God having proved unfaithful to His Word. At just the right time His gifts reach His needy children. In every age men have thus explored His Will and discovered His faithfulness.

We have no right to expect the fulfilment of God's promises unless we are prepared loyally to observe their conditions. It is, for instance, only " to them that fear Him " that this promise applies—that is, to those who set themselves obediently to live according to His Word. To wander off into by-path meadows, forsaking His law and giving ourselves to mere self-pleasing, is to forfeit all claim upon Him. How often, by permitting a sense of need to take hold of us, has He had to bring us back thence to Himself ! Let us be quite sure that we are honestly endeavouring to carry out His directions, even though we may be conscious of failure to realize them, and we may surely rely upon His supply of all our need " according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

My soul shall be joyful in the Lord : it shall rejoice in His salvation.

THIS is the courageous determination of a man who is surrounded by foes, whose outlook is dark, and whose very life seems to be in danger. There is nothing in his present circumstances to cause anything but gloom and apprehension. Evil seems to be triumphant, and the strength of his foes is altogether beyond his own. The very insecurities of his position drive him back upon God, only to find Him nearer than all the enmity—and stronger. Thus in the midst of strife he is kept peaceful and rejoicing. For while there is nothing in his circumstances to cause joy there is everything in His Lord ! Outward things may change their demeanour, but the Lord remains the same, and His favour is immutable. He cannot be sure of anything around, but he can be confident, and is, of the loving-kindness of the Lord. So he sings while the enemy frowns and threatens.

There are times in the life of every one when the Psalmist's circumstances seem to reconstruct themselves. "Earth's joys grow dim ; its glories pass away." Our foes are many and insistent. Around us is storm, and ahead of us all seems dark. Then is the time for finding what God can be to a distressed soul. Then is the time for putting Him to the test. And as we do so, we shall break out into a song which challenges the darkness and conquers our fears. For it is in just such an hour that we really get to know what He can be to us.

PSALM xxxvi. 7.

Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.

THERE is an eightfold reason for the confidence of the people of God upon which the Psalmist bases his song of joy. "Thy mercy . . . Thy faithfulness . . . Thy righteousness . . . Thy judgments . . . Thy loving-kindness . . . the fatness of Thy house . . . the river of Thy pleasures . . . Thy light." All these form the record of an experience which has created a firm faith in the certainty of His protection. Taken together, they declare an eternity of grace which meets the need of every man. For the sinful may take refuge in mercy which is stable as the heavens. The weak may rest upon faithfulness which reaches unto the clouds. The unholy may safely trust righteousness which is steadfast as the great mountains. The convicted may rely upon judgments that are a great deep. The broken-hearted may cling to loving-kindness which is altogether flawless. The hungry may be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's House, and the thirsty with the river of His pleasures. All the variations of human need are met in a winsome and sufficient God.

How many of us know these things to be true of Him, and yet do not avail ourselves of His sheltering wing, though aware of the constant call of His Spirit. We are manifestly unrested and unsatisfied, yet we do not draw nigh to prove Him for ourselves. We are like the beggar to whom a fortune is bequeathed, but who cannot believe the good news and fails to claim his inheritance. We live as paupers when we might live as princes. Should we not kindle our confidence anew by a consideration of His fulness, and put our trust under the shadow of His wings?

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

GOD breaks up our years into days and hours, and our journey into steps. Life is not one grand effort to be accomplished by a spasmodic girding of energy, but a succession of moments worthily lived, and of steps worthily taken. A single step may seem in itself to be but a trifling thing. And yet every step bears an important relation to the whole journey. Upon one false step the whole disaster of any life may depend. Upon a single step, wisely taken, an eternal destiny of joy may hang. It is good, therefore, to know that each step is ordered for us by the Lord. This is the minute ministry of His grace. Nothing is too trifling for His concern if it has to do with the lives of His children. Such is the quality and concern of the Father's love.

For some of us the steps seem to have been ordered unkindly. The hard straight path of duty stretches before us inexorably. We cannot avoid it if we would. Sheer necessity forces us to go on, and no other road opens for us. When the temptation to despondency and resentment comes, and when the irksomeness of it all makes itself an insuperable burden, let us remember, however, that our steps have been ordered by the Lord. It is on that account that along that pathway our chief happiness lies. It is the only way Home that is open to us ; and if we would not miss Him Who seeks to be our Companion and Guide, we must resolutely set out upon it with feet shod with courage, and with the eye of faith which sees in the hardest road the King's Highway.

For I am ready to halt . . . O my God, be not far from me.

THIS is the candid confession of one who feels that circumstances are too strong for him. Around he sees the organized enmity of his foes, and within he knows the weakness of his own nature. He has endeavoured to run the race with patience and to fight the good fight, but now a mood of despondency is upon him, and he knows himself on the point of giving up. "Ready to halt" exactly describes his feeling and his fear. For although it seems as though his strength would not further support him, yet he knows that to give in would cause the enemies of the Lord to rejoice, and he fears for the Lord's good name. At an utter end of himself, he cries to the Lord for the support of His presence, and, as ever, finds Him available. Out of the depths he cries, to find himself lifted to the heights of fellowship with Him, as is ever the experience of those who call for His aid.

It is not always the strength of our foes, nor malignant opposition to the cause to which we have committed ourselves, nor yet our feeling of strengthlessness, which tempts us to halt. Sometimes it is the seductive voice of one who appears as an angel of light, bidding us to have a care for ourselves, not to spend ourselves so prodigally in the service of Christ, to accept the good things which life offers on easy terms, to rest us in its pleasant arbours; and too often the Enemy succeeds in seducing us from our allegiance, to our utter undoing. To stand still or to hesitate is to court disaster. And be it remembered, that it is only as we go on that we may with confidence call upon the Lord's assistance. It is in the way of His own commandments that He meets us.

For I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner.

THE Bible is the book of the soul's pilgrimage. The Old Testament throbs with the echo of pilgrim-songs. The New Testament is full of the pilgrim quest. The Psalmist's outlook is prophetic of those who in every age have come to know the disillusionment which is the first product of Christian faith, the inexplicable estrangement from the surroundings of earth which comes to those over whom the Saviour has cast His spell. They are henceforth strangers ; for the world knoweth them not, even as it knew Him not. But they are strangers who have a transfiguring fellowship with God. His sympathetic companionship invests their every experience of joy and sorrow with a sacramental value. It is a well-spring of joy to them as they journey along the dusty highway. It is the unfailing inspiration which saves them from the danger of giving strength to things that are not of cardinal concern. To walk with Him robs the road of its monotony and loneliness, and takes away all tiredness.

How good it is to know that we are not only strangers but likewise sojourners here. The time of our stay is limited. We have no continuing city, but seek one to come. Night by night we dwell in an encampment. For the pilgrim host is an army beset with foes, but protected by the Divine presence of its victorious Leader. And between Him and each individual there grows an ever-deepening intimacy, based upon living experience of His deliverances, as the lights and towers of Home come nearer into view.

Thy thoughts which are to us=ward.

ALL the movement of redemption declares God's care for individual souls. The greater includes the less. He Who lifts men out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, to set them on a rock and order their goings, is not, and cannot be, unconcerned in regard to their lesser needs. His thoughts are ever toward them. All that concerns them is of interest to Him. The Father of a great family, He maintains a ministry of watchfulness toward all, even the least of His children. And herein is their restful content, that He thinks of them even when they are over-occupied and have little time to think directly of Him. When their own needs are hidden from their eyes He sees perfectly what is their lack and hastens to supply it. And even though, in the busy press and throng of life, they may forget and become actually careless, He still abides faithful toward them. He cannot deny Himself.

What a comfort is this doctrine of the Lord's earthward thought to those of us whose lives are not free from difficulty and pain and sorrow! How complicated do human affairs seem to get, and how entirely beyond our control! At times it almost looks as though we were bereft of all help and forsaken of all friendship. How strengthening is the realization in that hour that God's thought is toward us, that His heart is planning for us, and that His hand holds the provision which will not be withheld beyond the exact moment when it shall most effectively supply our need and minister to our faith.

Thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever.

THE contrast between those who fear God and those who do not, is well expressed here. The one imagines that he is sufficient in himself. He lives his own life without any thought of its higher claims, and consequently, sooner or later, he comes to grief. The other knows the weakness of his own nature, and listens to the instincts of his heart which cry out for that Divine fellowship for which men are made. It is thus that he commits the keeping of his soul in well-doing to Him as to a faithful Creator, and finds himself upheld. Strangely but indubitably his energies are reinforced, his vision clarified, his conscience quickened, his antipathies to evil strengthened, and his whole being renewed.

The child of God cannot live without communion with Him. He must constantly see the light of His face, or he cannot go on. No other radiance can dispel earth's darkness for him. And in this, too, he finds the provision of grace sufficient. For the same strength of the Spirit of God which upholds him inspires him to the activities of praise and prayer, and leads him also into the Sanctuary where visions of God are given to his sons. It is from thence, with faith and hope and love constantly renewed, that he goes out to live in the world as one redeemed. Do we always commit ourselves to Him so as to secure this Divine enablement and upholding? And do we bear witness, in a world which so largely ignores Him, to the reality of life and love?

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

IN this mirror which the Psalmist holds up to life we see ourselves. His moods and experiences are largely our own. For we all have seasons of despondency and downheartedness, when the light seems to depart from us and we go mourning. And no attitude of heart is more inimical to blessing. Troubled souls, bearing unnecessary burdens, and weighted down with unnecessary cares, provide the enemy with a weapon made ready to keep them out of that fullness of rest and joy and power which God promises to His people. Some are cast down by reason of their seeming lack of progress. Old temptations, which they thought were for ever done with, come back with insistence and power and get to closer grips than ever. Moreover, the very height of the ideal to which they are pledged, and the vastness of the territory to be conquered in their own lives, causes them utterly to despair. They forget that their own unregulated judgment in regard to spiritual progress is entirely untrustworthy, and that it is in Him, and Him only, that we have the witness.

Others are cast down because of their temporal circumstances, which have succeeded in mastering them. They entirely misconceive their Divinely-ordered purpose, and fail to recognize that their circumstances are God's tenderest and most loving expression of an entirely wise Will. Others are cast down because of the strange outcome of their honestly attempted obedience to the Word of God. The cure for depression, however caused, is to look away from self and circumstances and present experiences to Him Who is shaping life for His own ends. Herein alone is certainty and peace.

☉ send out Thy light and Thy truth.

IT is a good thing, when we become conscious that we have somehow missed the pathway, to stand still and ask for direction. When perplexed by the conflicting calls of duty, or surrounded by the enmity of those who are opposed to the cause we represent, or amazed at life's seeming cross-purposes, our strength and safety lie in standing still and calling upon our Guide. For since God has pledged Himself, in Christ, to go before us in the way of His Will, we need not, and must not, walk alone. The honest heart, keenly desirous of following His instruction when it becomes known, is never kept in any doubt either as to its general direction or detail. And herein our greatest difficulty is usually found. We commonly have more light than life, keener perception than desire of purpose. In most cases of uncertainty we need to deal not with God but with ourselves.

A not uncommon mistake is that of waiting for spiritual revelations of the Lord's Will appropriate to changing circumstances, and neglecting such ordinary means of knowing the same as are to hand. For God has for ever declared Himself in His Word. Every contingency of life is provided for in the principles which He has laid down for our guidance. True, He has left their sincere application to our own loyalty, and many are only failing to realize light on their pathway to-day because of yesterday's lack of obedience. The Bible does not disclose its riches of grace and guidance and glory to other than honest and true hearts. To these it never fails.

PSALM xliv. 4.

Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.

THE competence of life is the direct measure of a man's faith in God. Every profession on the part of His people involves them in opposition and conflict both within and around them. So subtle and strong is the foe that only He can organize victory over the stratagems and assaults by which we are assailed. And He never betrays the confiding soul. When we have learned, even by sorrowful experience, that we have no strength in ourselves to fend for ourselves, nor any wisdom to order life's great battle successfully—and are hence willing to take His way and co-operate with His plans—we have learned the secret of triumph.

God's deliverances do not always come in the form of dramatic intervention upon the course of affairs. Indeed, we may not always realize His delivering power until long after the event. For He works through the arrangement of circumstances, the impact of one life upon another, the steady responsibility which burdens bring, the pure joy which springs from simple things. By the use of these things He often effects the diversion of our minds from the temptation which threatens overthrow and directs our energies into channels of worthy endeavour, when else we should have given ourselves unwittingly into the hands of the Destroyer. Indeed, unto them that look for Him He does not fail to appear in the most ordinary things of life. And always with the high purpose of delivering us from evil. This is the redeeming energy of His Spirit.

Thou art fairer than the children of men.

THE beauty of the king has captured the heart of the singer. Far beyond the splendour of his court and the magnificence of his entourage, is the glory of his own person. The extravagance of the praise and worship lavished upon him is only justified in so far as the whole psalm is prophetic of Him Who alone fulfils all its promises and is worthy of its adoration. For in Christ alone is all this beauty seen. He alone is the repository of God's blessing, the expression of God's wisdom, and the instrument of God's power. He alone attracts to Himself a following which is transformed by its discipleship into something of His own beauty, and which finds, in cleaving to Him, more than abundant compensation for every sacrifice involved.

Christ's is the beauty of moral pre-eminence, of human sympathy, and of redeeming energy. His flawless life sets Him far beyond the sons of men and establishes Him for ever their Example and their Judge. The perfection of His sympathetic understanding of our nature and needs, our temptations and toils, brings Him closely to us as the incomparable Friend. The transcendence of His beauty awes us, while the imminence of His presence satisfies. For in His companionship we realize His sanctifying strength. He is ever working to renew and re-create us unto holiness and true life. Beholding Him, men are mysteriously brought under the influence of His power and are increasingly changed into the same image. There are His people qualified for His service.

Be still, and know that I am God.

HOW much we lose by over-activity. Restless souls whose lives are fevered by constant motion never really come to know God as He is to be known. For He is unhurried in His methods of revelation, and only those who take time to be holy can realize Him. We know this to be so in lower matters, and order our ways accordingly. We give time to the study of any subject which interests us, knowing that only so can we master its secrets. We contemplate the beautiful in nature, well aware that a mere glance does not interpret its message. We give time to the problems which perplex us in social and commercial life, for only so can we reach any satisfactory solution of them. And yet how frequently in respect of God have we neither time nor inclination for meditation. Let us be sure of this, that no soul ever yet grew into holiness, or acquired spiritual power, by mere occasional moments of communion with Him. The cultivation of the meditative spirit, the careful guarding of the still hour, and the maintenance of the child-like mind with its desire of inquiry, is of cardinal importance. The real power of life, for the meeting of its demands and the performance of its duties, is the direct outcome of knowing God.

It is no counsel of perfection to busy men which demands that time be made in order to know God. Any life which is too busy to seek the Sanctuary is busier than He ever intended His people to become. The restlessness which grows upon us all in this busy age is little less than reckless self-destruction if it hinders our sanctifying knowledge of our Lord.

He shall choose our inheritance for us.

HOW wise we are when we are willing that God Himself shall choose for us. In our poor half-blindness we make mistakes which are well-nigh irrecoverable, only to find as time goes on how they might all have been avoided by the simple surrender of our lives to His judgment. Is it because we do not quite trust His love? Is it because we have a lurking suspicion that the Will of God always, and inevitably, means the thwarting of our desires? Is it because we pride ourselves on the practical character of our outlook and reasoning? Be that as it may, there are few of us who have not come to see how different life might have been had our intentions deferred to His government and our preferences to His choice.

It is often our sense of value that is at fault. We are prone to judge the worth of things by their appearance, and their promise by material and sensuous advantage. And when our choices have been made accordingly, we find that we have to pay dearly indeed for things which proved to be but an empty shadow of our expectations. The bankruptcy of many a hope is the record of unwillingness to take God's way, which, when it opened as an alternative to our own wishes, seemed narrow indeed by contrast. When shall we learn that He withholds no good thing from them that seek Him, and that in every realm of our life's interest, it is more than safe to trust His judgment? Why should it be necessary that these fundamental lessons of life are most frequently learned through failure and loss?

We have thought of Thy lovingkindness, O God.

“AS a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” His mental food has everything to do with the formation of his character. The things upon which he habitually dwells become a fascinating and formative influence stronger than any other of life’s forces. For thought inspires action, and action determines destiny. How often have we been startled at the altogether unexpected moral collapse of one whom we had always regarded as far removed from such failure? Did we but know something of his thought-life no surprise would have been occasioned by his fall. The man who thinks avariciously becomes avaricious. The one whose thought-life centres in the sensual becomes sensual. Those who have no higher thought than earth become themselves earthy. And the contrary is true also. For those who centre their thought-life in God, who plant the fact of His lovingkindness, eternally expressed in Christ, in the very centre of their mental activities, become transformed.

Is it really possible to have our every thought brought into captivity, to be saved from vagrancy of desire, and to be steadfast of purpose in this respect? The answer is that were it not the whole scheme of redemption would break down. Its effectiveness is entirely measured by the imperatives it sets up and the creative inspirations it imparts. And it is by love that it works thus. Love is the secret of recollectedness. We have no difficulty in thinking of those in whom our hearts have found their anchorage. Remembrance of them becomes a positive and protective instinct; and so it is in respect of God’s lovingkindness. The measure of our thought is the measure of our love.

Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?

THE evil day comes to all who have been quickened unto repentance and faith. For the iniquity of former days is by no means done with when it has been forgiven. Like some great baying hound, it stalks us down and is ever and anon at our heels. Some days are evil indeed because of its insistence. Memory and conscience unite in our condemnation, and all seems lost. And yet in reality we have no need whatever to fear, since God has spoken our pardon and confirmed our forgiveness by the Blood of the Covenant. If we can but recall His assurances in our hours of conviction and depression we shall put the pursuer to flight. Despite every torturing self-condemnation—all of which may be well-merited—God is greater than our hearts.

The Enemy contests every inch of ground that the believer takes up. The fact that in former days he has given him a hold over his life makes the contest all the sorer. That he has in himself no answer to the jibes flung at him, only increases the depression of the sorely-pressed pilgrim. And yet he need not fear. The lions in the path are chained. He may turn the remembrance of old sin from being a deterrent into a positive incentive to moral effort and spiritual progress. For the Word of God is the warrant of his faith. What he cannot forget God has forgotten. That which is ever before his face is behind His back. The consequences of the old life may be the battleground of the new loyalty; but need not bring darkness to the soul. For He does not change.

PSALM 1. 15.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble : I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.

IN no age has the life of faith been without its cloudy and dark days. The pathway of light in which the believer walks is not unclouded by sorrow. As he goes on in the fellowship of the Lord he increasingly partakes of His experiences ; and none can read the record of Christ's earthly life without realizing how many were His days of trouble. But what was His door of deliverance is likewise ever open to His followers. Again and again He had recourse to the Father. He called upon Him, and was heard in that He feared. He was delivered, not from the experience of suffering, but from all that would have militated against His perfect accomplishment of the Father's Will and work.

Do not let us be afraid to bring everything to the test of prayer. God is concerned in all that concerns us. His permissive Will, if not His direct planning, is behind every cloud that hangs heavy above us. The trouble which burdens us is His invitation to prove Him by calling upon Him. And though not always delivered from the actual experience and discipline of pain and loss, we are saved, by His intervention, from all that would embitter our spirits or imperil our loyalty. He may not deliver us from the incidence of our troubles ; but He does save us from the evil that lurks in them. We need to beware, however, of the sin of ingratitude, lest we lose the benefit and meaning of His deliverance. For those who experience His faithfulness are bound to honour Him before men by giving Him glory.

I shall be clean. . . . I shall be whiter than snow.

MORE than any other this psalm has in every age been the ready expression of those who have been made conscious of their guilt. Out of the depths of self-abasement and despair they have cried to Him as did David, and have found, with him, a mercy wider than the sea. Like the miner, who from the bowels of the earth is able to look up the straight shaft and see the stars even at midday, so they are able to discern God's pardoning love and to cling to it. Despite their conscious defilement they may yet trust His cleansing power, expressed in His Word, which endures for ever, and base their prayer upon the certainty of His promise. Note how confident is the Psalmist, although overwhelmed in his own shame—"I shall be clean . . . I shall be whiter than snow." He sets no limits upon what God can do for such an one, and he knows that there is no term to His willingness.

How much clearer is our vision, both of sin and of God, than was David's. For Christ has revealed the deadly nature of sin and the holiness of God in a way which all who went before Him merely hinted at. It is He Who has shown that only men who are clad in white can walk with God ; that only those who are renewed in His nature can maintain fellowship with His sons ; and that only in Himself is the immeasurable sin-gulf between God and men bridged. And this is the glory of His Gospel, that every sinful stain may be cleansed in His Blood and that the utterly disqualified soul may be fitted to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light.

I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.

THE Psalmist deduces his doctrine of God from his experience of His ways. He has had indubitable evidence that evil cannot finally be victorious, since God's nature is what it is. And this is his ultimate security. Things may seem for a time to be all wrong. Men who deny God and defy His law may appear to gather strength and to prosper. Right may actually be upon the scaffold and wrong upon the throne. But he refuses to accept the present appearance of affairs as expressing God's last word. To give way to fear now, when new foes threaten him, would be to deny his most persistent memories. And he determines, come what may, to be true to what the past has taught him of His mercy.

Here is firm ground for all who are similarly threatened. There are times in the life of us all when the evidence of circumstances appears to point to the conclusion that God is unmindful of our concerns. Everything seems to be adverse to our interests. We are pressed beyond measure, and, as far as temporal things go, seem to be in a cul-de-sac. We may not be able to see a yard ahead ; but a steady look backward will help us much. For there we discern how faithfully God has fulfilled His Covenant despite our faithlessness. And the backward look both forbids despair and inspires new resolve to trust and not be afraid. " His love in time past " is an irrefutable argument for present confidence. When faith is hard pressed it can always summon memory to its aid, and so gather new strength.

Any that did understand, that did seek God.

WHEN men rightly read the facts of their own nature and of life, they instinctively seek God. For we were never meant to be equal to life alone. God made us what we are, and placed us in a world like this, with a view to our union with Himself. Our every capacity and aptitude is stamped with His image and superscription, and proclaims the truth that we are incomplete without Him. The man who is content with his own management of himself, and with his unaided performance of responsibility, has not yet learned the true meaning of life. At the bottom of all indifference to God's claim and covenant is fatal ignorance. When our aims are lower than His plans our greatest danger lies in our ability to reach them.

The hour of self-discovery is to many the hour of despair. For to know something of the heart's unsuspected disloyalties and tendencies is to be confronted with a problem to which there is no human solution. To realize the righteous requirement of God is to be brought face to face with the appalling fact of personal insufficiency and moral bankruptcy. But in that hour none is left without a guiding light. There is a solution to the riddle of human personality and the enigma of conflicting duty. It is in God alone, as He reveals Himself in Christ. To the one who sincerely seeks Him, with honest intent to order life according to His rule, He has pledged Himself. For "every one that seeketh findeth," and in such a way as to realize that he has himself been found.

Save me, O God, by Thy Name, and judge me by Thy strength.

THERE are crises in the life of every believer when he realizes that if help is to come at all it must come from God. Every avenue of escape is blocked, and every possibility of reinforcement is denied by the arrangement of circumstance. At an utter end of himself he can but cry to the Lord not only in fear but in faith. For he knows himself to be His child ; and as such he has a claim upon Him. Hence his prayer is not a panic-stricken cry so much as a confident appeal to pledged assistance. He is sure that he calls upon a living Person, Who has for ever declared His intention of protecting those whose lives are committed to Him. Deliverance may not come with any dramatic suddenness. God may—and often does—allow the wrath of man to work out its own destruction. But the issue is never in doubt. He has sworn and will not repent.

There is a Name given under Heaven among men whereby alone they may be saved. God has for ever declared His purpose and power of salvation in Jesus Christ. His is the Name which at once identifies Him with human nature and sets Him high over all as the Saviour of the needy. Just to breathe it softly in the hour of danger is to be reinforced unto resistance and victory. It is our defence and shield in every conflict, our confidence in every perplexity, our peace in every storm. For in that Name all the power of God is applied to the facts of our sin and sorrow. There is salvation in none other.

Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest.

THIS is the expression of a pessimistic mood—in which a good man has for the moment lost sight of God. He is wearied with the strife and tired of the tumult in which he seems to be getting the worst of things; and he imagines that if he could only be rid of everything that now presses upon him all would be well. He forgets that it is by these very things that men live; that safety is gained not by flight but by fight; that it takes no courage and shows no loyalty at all to run away from the disagreeable; and that any endeavour to escape can only end in his losing God. For it is just there, where he is hotly assailed and where life seems so hard as to be well-nigh impossible, that God covenants to meet him.

How easy it would have been for Christ to have avoided the unpleasant and unkindly things that menaced His mission and disturbed His life. Within call were legions of angels to scatter far every threatening foe. Yet to have availed Himself of their aid would have been the coward's way of the dove's wing. The accomplishment of the world's redemption demanded courage of a higher order than that. Nor was He found wanting. And in this He has pointed out the way of life to His followers. When you would fain have the wings of a dove to flee from life's hard things remember how He met this same temptation. Remember, too, that the same love which has made avoidance of the conflict impossible, has made it possible for us to fly above if not away from the disturbing elements. We may always mount up with wings as eagles. And strengthened thus we shall return to the field of strife with more accurate estimation of the forces for and against us, and with power to endure until the last shot is fired. How much more excellent is this way of life than that which the Psalmist desired!

Thy vows are upon me, O God.

NOTHING exercises such steady influence as a sense of responsibility. The knowledge that no man liveth unto himself has often saved those who are tempted to lower the standard and to embrace an easier way of life than the way of God's law. For it has brought some measure of consciousness of the power of influence. Others are involved in our actions. They are taking their measure of life and duty from our example. Upon us therefore rests the obligation of showing them both the desirability and possibility of the Christian life. For we are clearly marked out by our own profession as His disciples. We invite the inspection alike of the curious and the critical by the faith we confess. And our lives inevitably state the case for Him, even when we are unconscious or thoughtless of our influence upon the destiny of others. With His reputation entrusted to us, and the eyes of all men upon us, what manner of persons should we be?

Here is the determination of all our choices, the touchstone of all our habits, the standard of all our purposes. And we are judged according to the thoroughness with which we apply this fact to every realm of our being. For it is both constraint and restraint to the sincere believer. It is the impulse of every self-denial, of all avoidance of things lawful but not expedient, and of the daily walk along a pathway of unquestioned narrowness. For there are things we cannot do, since His vows are upon us ; albeit they are the vows of a perfect freedom.

Until these calamities be overpast.

THAT the sun will break through the clouds is never a matter of doubt with the Psalmist. The present calamities do not cancel God's promises. It was not for final overthrow that He brought His child into fellowship with Himself. And since He is "God over all, blessed for ever," the issues of the present cannot be uncertain. The reins of government have not fallen from His hands. He has not forgotten His mercy and truth which He promised to a thousand generations. One day the light will shine with all its early brightness, revealing that He hath done all things well.

Meanwhile, faith not only clings to the fact of His faithfulness, but nestles still closer to His side. Alone but for Him, in a world full of mysterious purpose, His child finds no rest of heart except in the shadow of His wings. But here all his fears are stilled and his longings satisfied. He is content to wait for the overthrow of his foes and the resolving of his anxious problems. For he is certain of Him. He knows he is not misunderstood in that safe shelter, and is not afraid to tell out all his heart to the ear of Divine love. And there he gathers confidence for the yet-remaining discipline of patience. The testimony of such a God-kept heart is what the world needs most of all in times like these. Its influence is beyond words. It keeps alight the lamp of hope. For it declares that beyond the darkness lies the certain dawn, and that it is good to quietly wait and hope for the salvation of God.

PSALM lvi. II.

Verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.

IT would sometimes seem as though the moral government of the world were in abeyance, as though wrong is in an unassailable ascendancy, and as though the only reward of righteousness is persecution and loss. Evil men appear to prosper while good men must struggle. On this account a sense of unfairness often takes hold of the most thoughtful and earnest minds, and at times actually prejudices their view of God's essential justice. It is well for all such to study the conditions and conclusions of the Psalmist. Confronted by the riddle of the prosperity of the wicked, and himself adversely affected by their arrogance, he finds solid foundation for faith and unfailing inspiration of patience in what he already knows of God's nature. He has himself felt something of His searching gaze and seen the white light about His throne. And he is content to leave other men to His assize. The cause of His child is safe in His hands. When we, like him, are able to confide our concerns to Him, our peace shall be like a river.

We do well to apply this word not only to our foes but to ourselves. When no other eye is upon us God is not unmindful of our doings. Motives and actions alike lie open to His sight. We may succeed in deceiving others, and even in persuading ourselves regarding the things to which we give ourselves. But He is ever silently watching and judging us. And His unerring judgment is recorded in the inexorable development of character. We carry about with us the sentence of life or death. Each day of our lives is a judgment-day.

The God of my mercy shall prevent me.

TO understand fully that the Lord is always going before His people to prepare their way would save us from much of the anxiety which ordinarily beclouds our life. We are all apt to see the difficulties and obstacles in the path through the medium of a fear which magnifies their strength. And, since pessimism in moral causes is always the forerunner of failure, that which we fear is almost sure to come upon us. For no man ever yet fought a good fight of faith while regarding failure as certain! There is a positively hypnotic influence in untoward circumstance which completely paralyses energy, if once its gaze upon us is unchallenged. But there is a far stronger power available, which breaks every fascination and scatters every fear. It is the recognition of the Lord's leadership.

To know that He first meets every foe before its challenge reaches me is a reassurance which invests life with new meaning and possibility. How can I fear the frowning thing which threatens my peace, if it has first had to pass the scrutiny of the Sentry? How shall I flee the difficult task which only comes to me through the protective circle of Divine love and wisdom? Why should I shrink from going forward against the hosts of darkness, since He has reduced them to impotence? Even to-day the thing I most dread shall only meet me after He has dealt with it. To this confidence all His former mercies encourage me. And in this assurance all victorious courage has its root and finds its inspiration to follow Christ.

Who will bring me into the strong city?

HOW to realize our hopes and purposes is the problem of every one who takes life seriously. Opposed by foes around and within, and committed to conflict by the very nature of our Christian profession, the need of some adequate reinforcement of our best efforts is perhaps our strongest consciousness. Who has not asked himself the Psalmist's question, as he has seen the distant towers of some Edom to whose conquest he is pledged but which seems utterly out of the range of his powers? Even though its ultimate possession has been assured to him by the Word of the Lord he has a deep conviction that unless he is Divinely strengthened and guided he must fall short. In such an hour a man's only safety and inspiration is in looking away from self, and from all others, to Him Who calls him to sonship and service.

For the call of God is not only the definition of duty. It is the declaration of dynamic also. His Kingdom is not in word but in power. Every hard and seemingly impossible thing, by which a man is confronted in the pathway of obedience, is a covenanted promise of strength. God does not mock us by setting before us ideals entirely beyond our reach. He will lead us into the strong city, making us "more than conquerors"—if only we are content to follow Him. And with every step we take, in obedience to a word whose greatness we cannot comprehend, shall come strength mysterious but mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. It is thus that His sons are brought to glory.

That I may daily perform my vows.

EVERY experience of God's mercy brings a new obligation upon him whom it blesses. The one who from the threatening storm has been lifted to the Rock that is higher, who in the sore battle has been sheltered in a strong tower, and who has found sanctuary from his threatening foes in the covert of God's wings, is involved in the responsibility of a new life. For under the stress of his fears he has not only cried to Heaven for help, but has pledged himself to obedience and loyalty which he is now bound to render. And this cannot be effected in one spasmodic effort. It must be carried out each day with new resolve and energy.

For it is in the small things which go to make up daily life that God is best served and glorified. "The trivial round, the common task" is the sphere which is open to all of us who are unable to attempt great things for Him. And it is by applying the loftiest consecration to the lowliest concerns that we most effectively perform our vows. Every day's duty brings fresh opportunity for this service, at the same time testing our sincerity of purpose and promise. And every day's mercies challenge afresh our devotion. He alone is true to himself, and to God, who makes every day bright with fulfilled vows and holy with unbroken communion. But he is deceiving himself beyond all possibility of recovery, who, while waiting for some great day to dawn in which he shall do some big thing, is neglecting that which comes with every sunrise and passes with every sunset into eternity.

God is a refuge for us.

THERE are times when no other conception of God appeals to us. Like an angry pursuer sin tracks us down. Its hot breath of conviction terrifies us. We know ourselves to be lost and undone ; and in our need and fear we cry for some safe shelter. Then like the hunted man-slayer, hard upon whose heels followed the avenger of blood, we see before us the open gate of the City of Refuge. Once across its threshold we are safe—sheltered under the oath of God. “ There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ! ” Never shall the fugitive who has abandoned himself to this covenanted security be delivered up to the consequence of his wrongdoing.

We have sometimes erred in thinking that it is from an angry God we need to find refuge ; and have imagined that Christ, having placated His anger, has become our shelter from Divine wrath. Whereas in truth it is not from God we must flee, but to Him. For in Christ He has declared Himself in regard to our sin and its outcome. All the grace and tenderness which the Son exhibited is the character of the Father. His Evangel is the proclamation of the Father’s forgiveness and untiring love. His open arms tell of the opened heart of the Father Who yearns over His lost ones. When we flee for refuge, it is from an outraged law and an accusing conscience to the Father, to Whom Christ is the Way. How safe is our shelter, and how sweet our rest, in the everlasting arms of a love which was before all time, and will be when time is no more !

My soul followeth hard after Thee : Thy right hand upholdeth me.

THERE are two conflicting ideas regarding the maintenance of the Christian life, neither of which is in itself a true definition. Nor does either alone afford a satisfactory working basis. The one declares that every ideal inspired by Christ must be attained by strenuous human endeavour. The other affirms that personal energy counts for nothing, and that God alone can carry out His Will in the human soul. The former stresses work, the latter submission, as the whole duty of man. And each is similarly out of harmony with the precepts of the Divine Word and with the experiences it records. For while the pursuit of holiness and the cultivation of character is enjoined upon all who confess themselves the sons of God, it is unequivocally declared that this is only possible by the Spirit of God. The energetic soul must derive its strength from the upholding Hand.

Only that man who with full purpose of heart sets out to follow Christ is assured of the aids of His power. His grace can only be known where His government is recognized. It is just here that so many fail, forgetting that while God does not regard prayerless work He likewise does not reward workless prayer. And yet how good it is to know that if we are following hard after Him—even though it seems at times as though we were following afar off—the right hand of His power is beneath and around us. Is it any wonder that the sincere man should be able to confess—"I can do all things through Christ Who strengtheneth me"?

The righteous shall be glad in the Lord.

HOW strangely full of joy was the life of the Saviour. Despite every outward circumstance that seemed to work against Him, and to make the realization of His aim impossible, He maintained unbroken fellowship with Heaven, and exhibited thus the joy of a satisfied heart. Moreover His immediate experience promised a greater and fuller satisfaction, and enabled Him to see a joy ahead, in comparison with which the weight and shame of the Cross were as nothing. And when leaving His followers, this was His richest legacy—"that My joy might be in you, and that your joy may be full." If His example and inspiration mean anything to us, surely our lives should exhibit something of this same quality. We should serve the Lord with gladness and not with gloom. And thus should all men know us to be His disciples.

The world is full enough of sighing—and with good reason. Its sorrows and disappointments cast heavy shadows upon countless hearts and homes to which Christ is a stranger. Its attempts to throw off the seriousness of life in forced gaiety are unspeakably pathetic. Its laughter is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Truly the children of God have a positive ministry of unaffected gladness to discharge in such a world. Surely it is our part to reflect the bright light of Christian joy which burns before the altar of a consecrated heart. For as certainly as we do this will the world come to believe in the reality of Him Who is still its unrecognized Lord.

As for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.

EVEN in the dim light of the days in which he lived the Psalmist could not content himself with any merely judicial pronouncement of forgiveness. While believing in the Word of the Lord which declared the pardon of confessed sin, he rightly sought the moral evidence of God's power within his own life. Nothing less than the change of his tastes, the destruction of his fetters, and the cleansing of his nature, could satisfy his awakened instincts. And such was his confidence in God that he could not believe His work to be less complete than that which his own heart demanded.

The Psalmist's confidence was prophetic of the Evangel which announces not only that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, but to cleanse us also from all unrighteousness. And it is this experience which should alone satisfy us. For we only know ourselves pardoned when we realize ourselves purified. We are not saved by belief in a doctrine, but by submission to a Divine power which works toward our present righteousness and our ultimate perfection. We know ourselves redeemed from sin's penalty hereafter because we are being saved from its power here and now. We are assured of the new Heaven and earth to come because we are already sure of the new man. Let us never deceive ourselves then by dispensing with the altogether necessary evidence of God's work *in* us, as though belief in His work *for* us rendered this superfluous. Let us rather honour God by trusting Him for what He has promised—and by declaring His glory in renewed lives.

Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

GOD'S processes sometimes blind us to His purposes. We are painfully conscious of the fire and water through which we must perforce pass long before we see the wealthy place toward which His mercy is leading us. It is often indeed after a long time, and only so, that, like the Psalmist, we can discern the unfailing goodness of the Lord which has been guiding us in all the seemingly untoward things of life. But we do well to remember that His thoughts toward us are always thoughts of good ; for only so shall we be saved from resentment. " Eye hath not seen nor ear heard " the things He has prepared for them that love Him. When we cannot see His face we may always be sure of His supporting hand. The trials of this present are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

He never willingly afflicts His children. If He has to chasten and discipline us it is for our profit, and in order that we may become partakers of His holiness. Only in the fire can the dross of sinful nature be purged out. Only in the water-floods can the fires of passion be extinguished. And only by coming to an end of our own resources in the painful experiences of life which are too much for us, are we prepared and capacitated for the " wealthy place " toward which He is bringing us, and of which every new experience of His grace is an assurance. One day, having the whole of life under review, we shall sing with full hearts of the love that led us all the way, and count all things well lost for the excellency of the Glory.

That Thy way may be known upon earth.

THIS is the purpose of all God's blessing of His people. They are not only enriched by His grace but are entrusted with it also. Each redeemed life is as a living link in the chain of His design for the world's redemption. For men are His method of mediation. Through those who themselves know the sweetness of forgiveness and the strength of mercy all nations are to hear the Evangel. And any who fail to give themselves to this service entirely misconceive the purpose of their high calling. For while God's love begins with the individual it by no means ends with him. The man whose whole ideal of good is comprehended in his eagerness to receive, inevitably fails to realize even this. For he can only be filled as he flows. Grace is given only as grace is expended.

The Christian life is not self-contained but Christ-communicating. Indeed this is its meaning, since every Christian professes to follow Christ, Whose life was the eternal contradiction of all selfishness—and in particular of religious selfishness. His eye was always upon the uttermost parts of the earth, and His heart toward those who sit in the darkness and shadow of death. And His followers are committed to His aims. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. Moreover, such is the nature of His blessing that it can only be retained by being distributed. "Use it or lose it," is the governing law of spiritual enduement. To attempt to live unto ourselves is to die.

God setteth the solitary in families.

WE are sometimes tempted to regard the unalterable circumstances of life as having little if anything to do with the goodwill of God. Especially is this so when one, awakened to a sense of His salvation and quickened into newness of life, finds himself entirely out of harmony with his environment. Nothing is so oppressive as the loneliness of soul which comes upon him as he realizes how little he now has in common with those to whom he belongs by the ties of nature. They misunderstand his ideals, misinterpret his sympathies, and misconceive his loyalties. And not infrequently some—and young Christians in particular—have found themselves desirous of getting away into more congenial atmosphere where it would seem easier to maintain the Christian life.

Let us be assured that all such flight is mere desertion of the Cause. For God has Himself arranged the circumstances of His people's lives with a view to their most fruitful witness. It is just there, where are those who know us best and see us at our worst, that we must stay as reflectors of His light to win them to His allegiance. Only as we do so are we at all fitted for witness-bearing further afield. There is a discipline of spirit in the irksomeness of family life which alone makes a believer competent to work for Christ in wider spheres. And in this the home of Nazareth is our inspiration. For there He lived among those who did not believe in Him. And there among those who did not understand and did not believe in Him. And there He pleased God throughout the long hidden years in which He was prepared for His work of redemption.

This also shall please the Lord better.

IT is not with mere outward observance that the Lord is pleased. For external acts of elaborate worship may be altogether divorced from real surrender of heart. Men may, and frequently do, sacrifice ox or bullock on conventional altars, without having any thought of devotion, or without entering at all into the meaning of their profession. But the praiseful heart none can simulate. The song of thanksgiving that rises spontaneously to Heaven from the soul that has come to appreciate God's mercies can never be imitated. It is the worship "in spirit and in truth" which the Father seeks, and with which He is well pleased. It is the incense which, ascending from redeemed lives, finds acceptance before the Throne.

Desire to please the Lord is the certain test of saving relationship with Him. We have not yet begun to know Him unless life has acquired this new impulse and is governed by this new dominance. And this in turn is attested by the degree in which praisefulness becomes natural to us. For the one whose heart enthrones the redeeming Lord is constantly making discovery of His goodness, and has daily, in consequence, new cause for thanksgiving. He sings because he cannot help it. He serves the Lord with gladness because he simply cannot serve Him with gloom. And the Lord is pleased when His children thus make melody to Him in their hearts. For it is then that He sees in them the travail of His soul, and Himself joys over them with singing.

Make haste to help me, O Lord.

IT is not faith so much as unbelief which voices this prayer. For faith never thinks of God as being too late, or as having no regard to the needs of His children. The one who trusts Him knows well that He is Lord of time as of all things. However black things may seem, and however hopelessly tangled human affairs have apparently become, he is content to tarry the Lord's leisure. Nor is his confidence ever betrayed. He knows that God may be unhurried—just because He is God. But He is never unmindful. Like Christ, the disciple can always say in the presence of that which challenges: "Mine hour is not yet come." For like Him we may always be sure that at exactly the right moment God will intervene.

Panic is always to be deprecated. Under its influence many an one has, like King Saul, taken upon himself action whose consequences for ever impair life and service. For when men fret themselves they are commonly minded to do evil. That God tests our patience by sometimes delaying His coming to our aid is an experience which all know. But, then, He judges the urgency of the situation with knowledge we cannot have; and if we sincerely commit our cause to Him in well-doing, we may quietly wait for the putting forth of His power. For He cannot deny Himself. It is strangely like the presumption of distrust which urges upon the One to Whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years, that He should "make haste." It is better far to tarry the Lord's leisure in quiet certainty.

I will go in the strength of the Lord God.

WE are never on such safe ground as when we respond to the challenge of life by asserting our relationship with God. Its demands and duties may well appal us, until we are utterly afraid to undertake them of ourselves. This, indeed, is their Divinely-ordered purpose. But in the promise of a strength that is "made perfect in weakness" we can unhesitatingly declare ourselves able to do all things, and may go forth with confidence to meet both the known and the unanticipated. However dark the prospect, or sore the struggle, we may lay to our hearts the fact of His available sufficiency, and may take unto us the whole armour of God. And in the record of those who have gone before in this way there is nothing but encouragement. For not one who trusted in His strength was ever left desolate.

Do we always realize that the strength of the Lord can only be experienced as we keep to the ways of the Lord? Many a man has been disappointed at his expectation, and has found himself worsted in some moral conflict, just because there was that in his life which made the partnership of God impossible. For light can have no fellowship with darkness, nor Christ with Belial. That is vain faith which does not find expression in good conscience. If we would "go in the strength of the Lord God"—as we must if we are to conquer—we must first "prepare the way of the Lord" in our own lives. When the crooked is made straight, the valleys elevated, and the mountains levelled, then it is that the glory of the Lord is surely revealed in saving strength.

He shall redeem their soul from deceit.

THIS prophecy is comprehensive of Christ's entire work. For His liberation of men is no arbitrary thing. Behind all human action lie intellectual conceptions. And He delivers us from evil courses by first of all delivering us from false ideas of good. It is thus that He destroys the works of the devil—that old serpent that deceiveth the whole world. For it is at once part of our sinful inheritance, and the consequence of wilful wrongdoing, that our eyes are blinded to true values. We trust in our own hearts, not knowing them to be deceitful above all things. We confide in uncertain riches, not realizing how they deceive men to their ruin. We trifle with specious sin, unaware that its deceitfulness is the while hardening our hearts. Yet ever and anon throughout the sacred Word ring out warning injunctions against the perils of self-deception. For it is part of the mission of Christ's Gospel in the world to enlighten men regarding their danger.

How entirely is Christ the antithesis of anything like deceit ! There was no deceit found in His mouth. He was—and is—incarnate Truth. And all His redeeming energy is directed toward delivering men from the enemy's snares, and toward making them true, even as He is true. It is by unveiling the false, revealing the real, proclaiming the only way of life, and empowering the believer to follow in His steps, He fulfils the promise and prophecy of this word. And they alone are wise unto salvation who make Him their Lord and Leader, following Him in the light which shines more and more unto the Perfect Day.

My flesh and my heart faileth : but God.

THIS is the language of one who has come up against life and finds it altogether too strong for him. Temptation has more than once overcome him, and his testimony is almost finally silenced. Frequent disappointment has cancelled his brightest hopes. Moreover, the prosperity of his foes, and the success of their enmity against himself, has nearly overthrown his faith. It seems as though God had left him, and as though he must ultimately go under. One thing is certain : he has come to an utter end of his own resources. Neither his spiritual desire nor his moral energy is sufficient for living worthily. He is well-nigh in despair, when there steals upon him the saving remembrance of God. His love of old time rebukes his despair. His faithfulness in responding to the cry of weakness in former days comes as a new inspiration to trust and not be afraid. Now he can look life in the face without flinching. God is the strength of his heart, and he needs none other.

When the weakness of our nature asserts itself, and when the outlook is dark and threatening, we may always reinforce faith by memory. For no life, however poor, is wholly barren of experience in which God has verified Himself. None of us is entirely destitute of irrefutable evidence of His power. And it is on this knowledge, so peculiarly our own, that we must build up our present confidence. The man who has learned instinctively to rebuke his faithlessness by "But God" has learned the secret of life. It is the pivot of faith upon which the issue of every contest hinges.

PSALM lxxiv. 13.

Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength.

THIS is the Psalmist's wonder not only at God's might but at the unusualness with which His doings are sometimes invested. For it is contrary to all conception of His ordering of things that the sea, whose bounds He has already appointed, should ever be cleft. We imagine His decrees—so far as we understand them—to be the ultimate expression of His creative power. Yet for His own purpose He is always able to declare Himself greater than His own laws. He is the Lord of Heaven and earth. In the lives of His children, too, God has no uniform method of exerting His aid. As with Israel, He sometimes brings them to the edge of the sea in order to test their faith in His leadership. They cannot go backward, for the foe is there, nor forward, unless it be into the deep. But who has not known the waves divide at His word, leaving a dry-shod passage for obedient feet? Truly He is the God Who only doeth wondrous things. If we are but loyally and faithfully following His direction we need not fear to trust Him for extraordinary deliverances as they may be needed. According to our faith so are they realized.

It was Christ Himself Who taught us to bring the challenge of the impossible things in life and duty to God. They are ideally intended not merely to test our strength but to discover the sources of our dependence. To trust God utterly, in the face of what seems an insuperable difficulty, is to discover Him in an altogether new and surprising fashion. It is in face of the impossible that we learn the faithfulness of His Covenant.

But I will declare for ever.

WHILE foolish men are strengthening themselves in their folly and pride, and ambitious men are searching hither and thither for opportunity of personal advancement, the man of God finds the only satisfying interpretation of life in Him. By contrast with the restlessness of those who are altogether self-centred, whose lives move in a plane of self-interest, his lot is peaceful indeed. For he has found the key which solves every mystery. To his faith unlocked doors open wide. Seeing God in everything, he has learned that the present is but a fragment of Eternity. Hence he can with patience wait for the Day which shall declare all things. Meanwhile, the possessor of a secret which transforms common things into instruments of God's righteousness, transfiguring all life as with golden glory, he cannot keep it to himself. He must declare the wonders of God, Who so completely satisfies the instincts of his being. While others are talking vain things, his theme is the unchanging mercy of the Lord.

The man who really knows God in Christ cannot be silent concerning His Evangel. It is part of the impulse of the new life to declare what great things He hath done. And it is, moreover, by this method of personal testimony that He is proclaimed to the world's enlightenment and blessing. Every redeemed life may, and must, phrase the Gospel in terms of its own experience. It is the glory of the Christian life that each one of us is competent to give an unique interpretation of Him. And it is by our steadfast purpose to "declare for ever" the truth by which we are made free, that the Kingdom is built up and extended.

PSALM lxxvi. II.

Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.

THE soul's response to God's revelation of Himself must be sincere. It is better to make no profession of fealty at all than to offer that which is unreal. How easy it is to form words of promise and resolve which have no animating spirit of intense seriousness we all know. Under the influence of a dominant emotion, when all within us is stirred by a sense of God's goodness, our lips are prone to utter words which bear no relation to the actual purposes of our hearts. Such unmeaning vows are the strongest condemnation of any who calls himself Christ's follower, and their effect is inevitably and indelibly impressed upon his life. For no man can play fast and loose with things of eternal moment without incurring permanent self-injury. On this, the lowest ground of all, is utter sincerity toward God emphasized as the supreme necessity of life.

How often have men attempted to bargain with God when in circumstances of extremity! If He will but deliver them from their present embarrassments they vow eternal loyalty to His cause in the world. If the blessing they seek be but granted to them they will serve Him with the full energy of life. But how often, when He has responded to their prayer, have they failed to fulfil their vows! And all such are judged, not by their intention but by their actual record. It is the "paying" and not the "vowing" which confirms the reality of faith. Let us beware above everything of the speciousness of mere word-offering to God.

I remembered God.

THIS is the key to the Psalmist's autobiography which he sets forth as a witness to the faithfulness of God. His life has not been all sunshine. There have been clouds and storms and difficulties innumerable. Many a time he has been at his wits' end, but never at his faith's end. In the darkest hour of distress he has been enabled to call upon God, because he has not altogether forgotten his earlier experiences. He steadfastly refused to allow the things that mystified him to cancel or obliterate the things he knew as certainties. He remembered God, and so was saved from despair. For since He is "over all, blessed for ever," darkness and light alike come from Him, and nothing which concerns the life of His people is divorced from His care.

It is just here that so many of us fail. On every hand are things that threaten our peace and challenge our faith. It would sometimes seem as though evil had got control, and as though life were the sport of blind and unfeeling chance. The temptation to look upon things that are seen, and to measure our strength against them, is well-nigh irresistible; and we can only overcome it just so long as we resolutely set the fact of God in the centre of all our thinking. But no man can summon the thought of Him to his aid in an emergency who does not dwell often and long upon the Word of His grace in ordinary days. The remembrance of God only becomes instinctive to him who makes the secret place of the Most High his habitation.

He led them on safely, so that they feared not.

THIS is the top-note of the symphony upon God's unerring wisdom and unfailing love in which the Psalmist declares His dealings with Israel. Throughout the days of their affliction in Egypt, in all the deliverances of the desert, and through all the fitfulness of their faith, His care never varied. Having set His love upon them He loved them unto the end. Even in the sharp discipline of affliction and defeat the eye of the seer discerns unfailing affection and fatherly concern. Though their way led through the territory of many enemies stronger than themselves, at whose hands they suffered many things, it nevertheless proved to be the right way, and the only way indeed by which they could come to a full knowledge of God's purpose. Whatever might be true of the rank and file, it was at least true of their leaders, that, recognizing His guidance, they did not fear to follow.

So, too, is it in the individual life of discipleship. Once postulate the leadership of Christ, and all fear is taken away. Only it needs to be borne in mind that His way is not always bright with flowers nor radiant with sunshine. There are rough mountain paths to climb, frowning foes to conquer, and challenging difficulties to overcome. No one enters the Kingdom except through much tribulation. Do not then be uneasy, as though some strange thing happened to you, if loyalty to the Lord brings you into such experience. And do not fear to go on with Him because the cost is what it is. Christ goes before you. But He is not so far ahead that you cannot touch Him, even in the dark !

For the glory of Thy Name. . . . For Thy Name's sake.

THERE are higher and worthier motives than consideration of our own case. Indeed, when we desire God's deliverances merely that we may be saved from annoyance, we are likely to ask in vain, because we ask amiss. It is not until we have learned to look beyond ourselves, and to see that there are causes which should inspire our praying, infinitely more worthy than those of self-concern, that we are really the servants of God. To the one who loves and seeks to serve Him, the fact that His interests are involved in the witness of His people, and that their witness is influenced by their experience, will be the strongest impulse of all in moving them to seek His intervention in life's crises. It matters little what the world may think of us, or what it may do to us. But it matters tremendously what impression the world receives of Him, and what is its answering attitude.

The self-forgetting love which prompts such prayer as this, is the product of daily meditation upon the vast love which He has toward us. Only they who nourish their hearts upon the Great Sacrifice, and who learn to appreciate the depth of His redeeming affection, can come to love Him so in return. Yet that this is no impossible ideal of life is attested by those who in every age have accomplished His service in the world. It is for His Name's sake, and for the glory of His Name, that they have gone out into the darkness against unnumbered foes. It is by forgetting themselves that they have found bright gems for His crown.

So will not we go back from Thee.

THE peril of reversion to a former mode of life is never far from those who seek to serve the Lord. The evil within our hearts is ever prone to respond to the evil suggestions which assail us from without ; and only by the power of the Lord's hand constantly laid upon us can we be true to our profession of faith and loyalty. Mere declaration of intent is pathetically powerless to keep us true. His grip alone can restrain us when passion runs high, and constrain when the heart-beat is sluggish. Only as the mind of Christ continually reinforces our own mind are we enabled to exercise right judgment as to the relative values of things we have forsworn and the things to which we are committed. And to this ministry the Lord has graciously pledged Himself, so long as we, for our part, willingly submit to Him.

The saddest sight in the world is that of one who once walked with Christ, and now walks apart from Him. The Church has many such in her membership, and each one stands as a strong warning against over-confidence. Once it would have seemed incredible to them that they should leave their first love. Their early keenness for the service and glory of the Lord appeared unalterable. Now the true glory has gone from life, and it has become crowded with lower and less worthy interests. Behind this outward perversion, however, lies in every case a secret history of heart-alienation. It is against this that we must pray, as does the Psalmist, if we, too, would avoid the perilous snare of backsliding. For no man is stronger than his communion with God makes him.

Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

GOD'S invitations to His people are ever on a generous scale. His gifts are at all times exceeding abundant above all that we ask or think. And never does the beneficence of His love shine so brightly as when seen in contrast with the fickleness of His people's faith. The history of every life is, like that of Israel, rich in experience of the Divine bounty. Each page recounts abundant mercy, abundant pardon, and abundant grace. Never have His promises been pleaded in vain. Never has His sympathy miscarried. Never have His children had cause to dispute the wisdom of His ways, or to distrust the constancy of His love. The opened mouth has ever been filled from the bounteous Hand. Every hunger of the soul has been satisfied at the King's table. Nor are His ways changed to-day. As ever, those who wait upon Him are made partakers of His riches.

Alas, like Israel, we too often fail to hearken to His voice, and in our impetuous folly will have none of His rule. Both in the wilderness and in the Land of Promise the nation soon forgot its indebtedness, and impiously turned from His ways when they seemed to conflict with their own ideas of good. And it is thus that we too fall from affluence to bankruptcy, and from the privileges of sonship to beggary. For Heavenly enrichment always bears its countersign of obligation. When the mouth is filled, it is in order that hand and foot and heart should unite in doing God's work and in walking the ways of His Will. Contempt of responsibility, while it brings no repeal of the promises, puts us hopelessly out of reach of their enjoyment.

PSALM lxxxii. 8.

Arise, O God, judge the earth: for Thou shalt inherit all nations.

THE man who looks out upon the seeming injustices and inequalities of life will soon lose his confidence, unless his eyes are also lifted to Him Who is the Judge of the nations. There is enough in the world to disturb the strongest faith if its vision is bounded by a too-near horizon. The bravest heart may well quail before the incessant tumult and conflict in the midst of which we live. Class against class, interest against interest, nation against nation, makes for unending disquiet. Many an one has lost himself entirely in the passing phases of the conflict. But many an one also, like the Psalmist, has been enabled to endure and to wait for the ultimate solution of the perplexing mysteries, because, beyond the area of strife, he has seen the coming of the Day of God. Above all the water-floods of man's sin and strife he has seen the Lord sitting as King for ever.

We need nothing so much to-day as the buoyant confidence that the earth is the Lord's, and that, despite every apparent contradiction of His rule, He shall yet inherit all things. It was this vision which filled the mind of Christ in His redemptive conflict. The joy that was set before Him—of gathering together in one all the scattered flock of God out of every kindred, and nation, and tribe, and tongue—was the secret of His endurance of the Cross. Of final victory He never entertained any doubt. And it is as His disciples follow Him in this same spirit, and with this vision, that they too are made "more than conquerors." Remember, beyond to-day lies Eternity.

Thy hidden ones.

THE day of manifestation of the sons of God is not yet. One day they shall not only see Him as He is, but shall be glorified together with Him, sharing His triumph and casting their crowns at His feet. Meanwhile, their life is hid with Christ. The world knows them not because it knew Him not. It despises them as it despised Him, and with the same fatal error of judgment. For the outward dimensions of their life are not by any means their entire measurement. In their secret fellowship with the Most High they abide under the shadow of the Almighty. While in the world they are by no means of it. While endeavouring to serve its eternal interests they are by no means subservient to its dictates. They seek those things that are above, and press on toward the mark for the prize—not of earth's fading honours, but of the high calling of God. And they number all who have found in Him their redemption.

Against His hidden ones the forces of evil are always in opposition. For their life—so far as it is visible to men—is inevitably a condemnation of the purposes and practices of those who are frankly of this world. And the great enemy of souls well knows the strategic value of every life which draws moral energy from the great reservoir of Christ's Risen Life. To confound such is always of importance to His kingdom. Hence those who look forward one day to be manifested with Christ are now compelled to bear His cross and to suffer with Him. Yet, hidden in Him, no shaft of evil can touch them apart from His permission. This is their safety and their peace, their confidence and their unfailing joy.

PSALM lxxxiv. 4.

Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House : they will be still praising Thee.

THE House of the Lord stands not for any visible building but for that invisible fellowship with Himself unto which His children are called. The conditions for its maintenance are simple and within reach of each. For faith and obedience set up a partnership with Him in which all the influences of His grace become actively operative for the spiritual and moral development of His children. Their safety from the wiles and assaults of the enemy, their growth in likeness to the Divine ideal, and their fitness for the work of the Kingdom in the world, are all consequent upon their abiding in, and with, Him. This is the great lesson which Christ Himself taught in His last discourse. Above all this, however, the sense of indebtedness grows upon the one who dwells in His House. And he cannot but sing praises continually.

The springs of Christian joy run deep. The disciple of Christ exults, not in the outward and constantly changing circumstances of life, but in the reality of the grace of His Lord. It is thus that he can live praisefully even in dark days and when around him all is threatening. For he dwells amid the things that cannot be shaken. His is the joy which no man takes away. It is well to remember, however, that inward impulse to rejoicing must be converted into active energy of service if it is to be of any real value. True praise is not merely of the lips but of the hands, and feet, and being. It is in this way that the praise of His people becomes the blessing of the world.

He will speak peace unto His people . . . but let them not turn again to folly.

GOD'S peace is no mere judicial pronouncement. It is rather the setting up of an entirely new relationship between the soul and Himself. It speaks not only of warfare ended but of wills harmonized and lives adjusted to a new control and purpose. It is the well-spring of all good and of every spiritual blessing. It is God's own creation, sealed to His people in the precious Blood of His dear Son, and conveyed to their hearts in the ministry of His Holy Spirit. It reaches back unto the furthest distances of the past, and forward beyond all the horizons of life. It garrisons their hearts in safety from all assault and invasion of the enemy. It brings their every thought into subjection to His rule. It is His Unspeakable Gift, for which His people will give Him thanks throughout time and eternity.

There is always danger of treating the Divine goodness indifferently. Hence it is that we who are enriched by God's speech of peace are exhorted not to turn again to folly. Although translated unto the Kingdom of His dear Son, none of us is immune from the temptation which lurks in the world's attractiveness. And nothing is more tragic than the case of those—and there are many—who, having tasted that the Lord is gracious, have turned back to the worn-out and destructive pleasures which are found outside the boundary of His rule. Against this peril we are only effectively armed as we seek, with all prayer and diligence, to be controlled by the mind of Christ. Herein alone is our security.

PSALM lxxxvi. II.

Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy Name.

IT is well to encompass our declarations of spiritual purpose with humble prayer. Only the teachable spirit, and the heart united to the Lord, can produce abundant life. The man who would walk in the truth must first know it; and hence the prayer, "teach me." The one who would order his life according to the Divine standard must realize a power beyond his own; and hence the prayer, "unite my heart." For light without life, precept without power, ethic without dynamic, merely means constant and increased condemnation. It is therefore of the utmost importance to each of us to maintain at once the teachableness of the scholar, and the passion of the bride—the humble spirit which sits patiently at the feet of the Teacher, and the devoted love which counts life itself as entirely belonging to the King.

God has His own ways of answering our prayers. True, He does at times give swift flashes of intuition by which we perceive His Will with unmistakable clearness. Most often, however, it is by the steady and slow progress of the light, as from dawn to mid-day sun in these our northern climes, that He teaches us. We must needs read in two volumes—the inspired Word and the book of human life. And many a lesson has to be learnt again and again ere its true significance takes hold of us. Power, too, is not a sudden acquisition so much as a gradual accumulation in the life vitally united to the Lord. Since we pray thus, let us then take time for God to answer. And whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

All my springs are in Thee.

THE source of every moral virtue and energy is in God. Men are, at best, channels of His grace—never reservoirs. Apart from union with Him life must become stale and insipid, for its own resources are altogether inadequate to the strain under which its mission must be fulfilled. We may conjure up memories of His goodness and power; but memory is insufficient as an enduement for present service. We may dwell upon the facts of His greatness and faithfulness; but mere truth is of itself a powerless abstraction. We may mark the progress of His work in the world; but mere observation of His doings cannot energize us to faith or enterprise. Nothing less than fresh tides of Divine life flowing into the soul can avail to cleanse and invigorate His people for their loyal obedience. And these are always available. For this word, indeed, is an adumbration of the Gospel as Christ taught it—“Abide in Me and I in you.”

Where many of us fail is in endeavouring to mingle streams of mere human quality with those which rise in the hills of God. We rely upon Him for the grace which saves from sin's penalty; but for the nourishment of our soul's life we turn to other sources, only to find that they are at best broken cisterns that hold no water. This is why so many lives are weak in the essential things of Christian witness. And yet His life is sufficient and available for the entire man—spirit, soul, and body. How great is the folly which persists in displacing “all” by “some,” and in seeking to live on less than a full endowment of grace.

Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark ?

IT is the perplexity of many to-day, as with the Psalmist, that God allows His children to come into darkness. Whatever be its second cause—sorrow, disappointment, failure of hope, or still sorer experiences, the fact remains that many who fear and obey Him do at times walk in darkness and see no light. At such times the temptation to imagine that somehow God has forgotten, or that He is punishing them for some defection from His Will, almost inevitably assails them. With such thought in their hearts they cannot struggle through into light, and often settle down to the acceptance of unrelieved gloom as though it were final. Hopeless, they look upon themselves as out of range of God's power, regarding it as impossible that His wonders can be known in the dark.

Yet the experience of His doings in every age contradicts such faithless reasoning. The darkness has always been His workshop, wherein souls have been fashioned unto beauty and usefulness. They have learned to know Him by the pressure of His hand when it has been impossible to see His face. Like the song-birds of the Hartz Mountains they have been taught to sing in the night. Out of thick darkness, where God was, they have come like Moses with shining faces, bearing His message to men. In fact, their whole lives have been an irrefutable answer to this query. And why should it not be with us as with them? Faith, and submission, and patience are all that is needed for the experience of His wonder-working power in the darkest night.

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.

IT is the sound of the silver trumpets sounded over the consecrated offering on Israel's altar, that the Psalmist has in mind. It expressed, to a sacrificing people, God's acceptance. In its far-carrying tones they heard the voice of God declaring His Fatherhood and their sonship. Happy were they, indeed; for from thence flowed all their blessings. Their privileges were the outcome of this avowed relationship. They could henceforth walk joyfully in the light of His countenance, reckoning upon His faithfulness to supply their needs and subdue their foes. And their joy is but a feeble forecast of the blessedness of the life truly consecrated upon the altar of Christ's sacrifice—the normal life of the citizens of His Kingdom.

Many of us are in peril of losing the fulness of Christian joy by our failure daily to renew our early vows of allegiance. There is, perhaps, no danger so subtle as that of taking things for granted in regard to our Heavenward relationship. We know, of course, that He does not change toward us, and that we can at all times reckon upon His Word of promise. Yet we fail to remember the reciprocal side—the maintenance on our part of the conditioning attitude. And we lose brightness and joy because we do not daily hear the joyful sound. His voice of love does not sound in our hearts with its strengthening assurances. The glow of the first love is not maintained; and the world sees us a passionless people—and a powerless. Yet how different it might be, did we but make the compassing of His altar the first business of each day.

Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.

THOSE who dwell nearest to the Lord realize most their need of His enduement for their life. Consciousness of sin, hidden it may be from other eyes but revealed in the light of His presence, only intensifies their sense of unworthiness. Called to be His servants, and the mediators of His blessing to the world, they know themselves utterly incapable apart from His Divine assistance. From their own inner lives they can never evolve an outward witness of any effectiveness. If their lives are to commend Him, it can only be as something of His beauty is put upon them by His power. This, then, is their prayer. Nor does it fall upon deaf or unwilling ears.

Nothing is of such value to commend the Gospel as a Christ-like life. No amount of zealous service, or eloquent speech, or vigorous enterprise, is any substitute for the testimony of a holy life. For men are convinced not by the enunciation of truth so much as by its incarnation. The fact of a life which exhibits the love of Christ—His generous sympathies, His unfailing patience, His inflexible righteousness, His unflagging zeal, and the marks of His self-sacrificing passion—cannot be gainsaid, nor its message set aside. Nor does it ever fail of its mission, even though men may reject the Christ it exhibits just as they once rejected the Christ manifested in the flesh. All unconsciously and without ostentation it fulfils its high calling. And it is the glory of the Evangel that upon redeemed lives His beauty may be so set, if we are willing to follow His steps.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

HOW complete is the promise of victory over all foes which attaches to the life of communion with God! From whatever quarter the attack of the enemy is launched, and in whatever guise he comes, we may experience triumph through the indwelling Spirit of the Lord. The lion may well stand for those great and easily-recognized foes which roar against us and leap upon us, and against which we have no might of ourselves to stand. Many temptations are of this order. There is nothing subtle about them, but everything strong and menacing; yet they are not the greatest of our foes. The adder represents a different order, less threatening in appearance but far more difficult to evercome. For it stands for those hidden and unexpected assaults which spring at us ere ever we are aware. As a man walking heedlessly may startle the snake from its hidden lair, so at any moment secret passion suddenly flames into being to our undoing. None can tell when its deadly blow may be delivered; and all who would avoid its poisoned bite must walk warily indeed. The dragon represents yet another and still more powerful adversary. For it exists only in the imaginations of men; and thus well represents those oppositions and conflicts which arise entirely out of unsanctified and uncontrolled thoughts of the heart. It is, indeed, under the power of such that most believers fall.

Yet the Spirit of God can make us strong to overcome the lion, to avoid the adder, and to trample down every suggestion of doubt and sin which, dragon-like, threatens our destruction. Thus is the Gospel promise, that we should be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us," anticipated and foretold.

3 shall be anointed with fresh oil.

PAST blessing may become a positive deterrent to present holiness. When we satisfy ourselves with the mere fact of having at one time received gifts of Divine power—which may have been entirely exhausted by the special service for which they were given—without seeking constant renewal of the Lord's grace, we are in the greatest peril. For as the mill-wheel is not turned again by the water that has flowed over it, so past experience is only helpful in so far as it leads us to present and continued trust in God. It can never of itself be sufficient for to-day's responsibilities. Yet this is the fulness of the Divine promise, that grace is given to replace expended grace, that Heavenly strength is imparted for earthly needs day by day, and that fresh oil is unfailingly ministered to him who is willing to be set apart for the Lord's service.

As under the Old Covenant, so now, it is for the work of prophet, priest, and king, that God's people are anointed. And surely this is the work of us all. For all His people are called to tell forth the glorious Evangel by which they have themselves been saved, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ, and to reign in life over self and sin and circumstances. This is, in fact, the interpretation of the Divinely-arranged detail of every life, both in the restricted circle of home and in the larger sphere of Church and world. But only in the power of a fresh anointing is it possible on any day to fulfil His expectation and to carry out His Will. Let us be sure of this, that if there is any failure in this respect it is not on His part.

The Lord on High is mightier.

THIS is the vision which changes fear to triumph, and inspires His people to unmoved confidence. When the storm-clouds break, and the floods seem to endanger their foothold, they know that no wind blows except as it is released from His treasure-house, and that no flood takes its course which has not its rise in the everlasting hills. Behind every menace, therefore, they read His permission, and are satisfied to wait until storm and flood have cleared, in the certainty that the sun will shine and that earth will be the more beautiful and fruitful for their visitation. Those who see Him above all the powers of Heaven and earth cannot but live peacefully. With Christ in the vessel, and the Will of the Father directing the tempest, they can smile at and sing through the storm.

It is hardest to realize God when the storm seems to be entirely of man's arousing. Who has not known the blast of human enmity, jealousy, and malignity, which has threatened to overthrow even the house built upon the Rock? And who has not at such times questioned with his own heart as to why God allows such a tempest? Yet it is just then that such a word as this is most full of sovereign assurance. If He is mightier than all the malice of men, He can make even their wrath to praise Him. If second causes serve the interests of Heavenly love and wisdom, why should we resist them? If He is mightier than our foes, why not leave them to Him? And what need we fear if His guiding Hand controls the course of the gale?

Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord.

THIS is the language of one who has passed through the experience he proclaims. For when God is dealing with His children, disciplining their spirits and moulding their lives according to His purpose, they are mostly unable to sing praise. The grace of submission may be theirs but the voice of melody is seldom in them. For, indeed, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." It is only when the harsh and often prolonged experience of pain, of thwarted will, of disappointed hope, of miscarried plan, is seen in perspective and judged by its beneficent effect, that its true value is recognized. Then, indeed, it is that God's children are able to glorify Him for the painstaking love which has wrought in them toward their perfecting.

Meanwhile, it is well for each one of us, who from time to time is chastened in ways beyond his understanding, to remember that it is the Lord's own hand that wields the instrument of our discipline. If He committed our correction to others it would be ten-fold harder to bear. But since He is nearest to us when He is thus dealing with our faults and assuring our future, we may find blessedness even in the Valley of Humiliation. Just behind the second cause HE stands. It is His own control which determines the severity of the stroke and the stretch of the painful road. Realizing this, we cannot repine, nor can we wish to be freed of the yoke. For His perfect love is allied to perfect wisdom. One day in clearer light we shall see that He has at all times taken the easiest way with us.

We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His band.

HOW safe then are we, and how certain of guidance. which cannot err ! It is only when we lose sight of His Covenant that we become possessed by fear and weakened by panic. It is true that life often seems to frown upon us and its circumstances to combine against our well-being. To our limited understanding things sometimes seem to be hopelessly tangled, and we imagine ourselves forsaken. It is in such hours that the enemy sows his noxious seed of doubt into receptive hearts, which bring forth only too abundantly the fruit of bitterness. Whereas, all the time, did we but recall to ourselves the word of our faithful God, we should realize that we are being led into rich pastures and a spacious fellowship. For nothing can alter the facts of God ; and we are His Blood-bought.

At the same time we can, and often do stray from His ways. What no foe can compass our own waywardness too often accomplishes. It is when we are found on enchanted ground that our great adversary works his will upon us. And not only do we suffer, but the Name we bear is dishonoured and degraded. That His people should be found outside the confines of His commandments, and His sheep beyond the protective hedges of His providence, is a reflection upon Him ; and the world is not slow to conclude that His provision does not satisfy. How serious then is our responsibility to walk close to Him, and carefully, lest by straying away we seem to contradict the declarations of His Evangel before those to whom He is yet stranger.

Show forth His salvation from day to day.

THE obligation of commending the salvation of God rests upon all who experience its richness. While fellowship with Him begins with the individual believer it by no means ideally ends with him. The Gospel calls us to personal relationship which inevitably has social consequences. Christ taught with unclouded clearness that faith is a visible thing. Its evidences are indubitable ; its fruits none can mistake. The man who has himself been saved cannot, in the nature of the case, keep the Unspeakable Gift to himself. Should he attempt to do so the realization of its possession will elude him. " Use it or lose it," is the law which governs every spiritual blessing. Hence to " show forth His salvation from day to day " is just the equivalent of letting the new life express itself. If unhindered, life is always declarative.

" From day to day " would seem to indicate that to the saved man every common day is holy, and every sphere of life full of opportunity for the service of his Lord. Not only in the Sanctuary but in the street he finds his mission. All with whom the necessary correspondences of life bring him into contact are his congregation. And by every attitude and energy of his being he declares the greatness of Christ's salvation. Mark well, that it is not merely or entirely by speech that He is commended. The ministry of " showing forth " is by no means confined to words, however eloquent. It is by the indubitable witness of a life saved from the power of sin, and inspired unto selfless devotion to the Lord, that we hold forth the Word of Life.

He that love the Lord, hate evil.

MORAL indignation is one, at least, of the evidences of vital union with God. Every record we have of His doings confirm us in the confidence that He cannot be passive in the presence of evil. His holiness is a redemptive energy wherever sin holds men captive. And those who are joined to Him inevitably partake of His passion. Since He makes no truce with unholiness in any shape or form, no more can they. He is a Man of War against everything that threatens the well-being of His creation. And so too are they that are with Him. To love Him is to share His purposes. And hence no man has a right to call himself a son of God who nourishes any secret sympathy with the works of the devil which He was manifested to destroy. This is a drastic test, but entirely justified. The measure of our active hatred of evil is the accurate measure of our love to Him Who redeemed us from its power.

To compromise with the unholy or the unclean in our own lives is treachery to Him Whose love we profess. To admit without challenge the unrighteous thought or purpose is like opening the gate to the foe; while to devote any strength to the acquisition of the gains and pleasures of evil is nothing less than actual desertion of His cause. Does this mean rigorous self-discipline? Unquestionably. But "it is the way the Master went"; and none other is safe for the servant. One of His highest words of commendation was addressed to a company of believers who hated "the things that I also hate"!

PSALM xcvi. 3.

He hath remembered His mercy and His truth toward the house of Israel.

IN what striking contrast to the fluctuation of their purpose is the faithfulness of God as seen in the history of Israel. Theirs is a story of fitful and aimless wandering, of broken vows, of lightly discarded ideals, of idolatries and ingratitude, of shame and sorrow, His is a record of unmeasured mercy and flawless truth. Over against their forgetfulness—the fruit of their sin—is set His remembrance of them. Grieved and disappointed, and anon moved to indignation—as witness the speech of His prophets—He yet never revoked His Covenant nor removed from them His lovingkindness. Did they under the stress of untoward circumstance but turn toward Him, it was always to find His arms of love outstretched and the smile of welcome upon His face. And He is the unchanged Lord.

How full of comfort is the doctrine of the Lord's remembrance ! To be assured in all the cares of life its strain and anxieties, its responsibilities and duties—which too often successfully crowd out the thought of God—that His care is unremitting, is an inspiration beyond all compare. To know that in our busiest days and weariest nights, when we forget even to claim His promise, He is remembering His mercy and truth toward us, is to be reinvigorated for our every obligation of sonship. And to recognize in the common and daily-renewed gifts of life expressions of His remembrance, cannot but tune our hearts to sing His praise in tones altogether convincing to those who hear the strains.

They called upon the Lord, and He answered them.

THIS is the history of the life of His people in every age. The prayer of need, and the response of Divine love and power, comprehend all the essential facts of their being. Reduced to its ultimate analysis, there is neither more nor less to be said in any life than this. From the earliest hour, when, under the conviction of sin, we called upon Him, to this present, when, with fuller knowledge of life and its meaning, we daily ask for our varied needs, the entire record is of His faithfulness to His pledged Word. Not that He has always answered according to our expectations. Sometimes He has said "No" when we hoped for "Yes"; and sometimes He has bidden us wait when we anticipated immediate deliverance or enrichment. But His way has always been justified. Already we know that His every answer was exceeding abundant above all that we asked or thought.

And yet how indifferently we often look upon the Divine ordinance of prayer! How easy we all find it to become slack in its exercise! How cold and lifeless, even to ourselves, do our prayers often seem! Perhaps it is because we do not cultivate a spirit of naturalness in our dealings with God. We repeat prayers almost as by rote, instead of relating them to our immediate concerns and winging them Heavenward with intense desire. Or, perhaps, it is because we do not look out for His answers, nor give thanks when we recognize them. For nothing kills true prayer so surely as ingratitude. We lose all when we lose the child's art of calling upon our Father at all times.

It is He that hath made us.

AN obvious truism this, and yet one we are prone to forget ; else we should not grumble at life as we so often do, nor chafe at its circumstances where they seem to conflict with our desires. For if we realize that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," we should not be envious of the capacity or possession of others, nor should we decline to do what we obviously can, with life, because we cannot do what we selfishly would. It would breathe the spirit of a large content into all our feverish ways to remind ourselves at the beginning of each day—and at its close—that He, our God and Father, "hath made us" and our circumstances ; that we are not the creatures of any blind force, but the creation of far-seeing love ; that life is not hazardous chance, but carefully-planned guidance.

This is one of the well-springs of Christian joy. For how can we be other than joyful when we realize that every detail of our lives, as well as their grand design, is a thought of God ? And how glad we must be if we know with assurance that we are just in that place where He most wants our witness, and that our service, just there, is of value to His entire cause. How free, too, of all anxious care regarding the future does this declaration make us ! For since life is thus Divinely planned, it cannot be that the days to come should hold aught but good. Well may we rejoice with such certainty of love to rest upon, and with the assurance—deduced from every available testimony to His ways—that, having begun in us a good work, He will perfect it until the Day dawns.

I will sing of mercy and judgment.

MERCY and judgment are the constituent elements of the redeemed life. Together they make up the whole of its content. And, strange though at first sight it appears, they are mutually creative of the true harmony of any life. For they express the necessary moral conjunction in the character and work of God. As Father, He is concerned, not only with the pardon of His children but with their perfecting. As the Holy One, He is concerned, not only with their legal acquittal but with the creation of actual goodness in them. Hence mercy and judgment are always correlative, and in striking contrast to mere human qualities. For at best human mercy cannot judge, and human judgment cannot show mercy.

It is not surprising that one who has experienced the lovingkindness of God should make it the subject of his song. To sing of judgment, however, is to make music of that which is often painful and not infrequently perplexing. Yet in looking over life's course it is impossible not to perceive that apart from His judgments—not retributive but reformative—we should never learn either the sinfulness of sin or the limits of self-help. By its consequence in our own being we come to realize that God hath dealt with us as with sons; although at the time, the frustration of our plans, the humbling of our pretences, the interference with our choices, all brought us to sorrow, and often near to resentment. Now, however, we realize that judgment has, in fact, been mercy disguised in mystery. We can elevate our experience into a positive Evangel for the blessing of other lives, and sing of the grace which has woven the web of life with mercy and with judgment.

He weakened my strength in the way.

GOD has sometimes not only to lay a restraining hand upon us, but to make us conscious of our own weakness by placing upon us burdens far heavier than we can bear unaided, and by bringing us into circumstances which make helplessness our most vivid consciousness. Only so can He bring us to entire dependence upon His strength. This is the interpretation of the unexpected withdrawals of health, of mental vigour, and even of moral force, which have so often perplexed us almost to the point of doubting His care. For it is only so that we come to an utter end of ourselves, which is the conditioning state for receiving the illimitable fulness of His life. If He weakens our strength in the way, it is only with a view to increasing it afterward.

It is by suffering ourselves that we acquire sympathy with those whose entire lives are spent in weakness and pain. We are quite unable to help others who faint under life's burdens unless we, too, have felt the pressure of such burdens to be too much for us. Only they whose hearts have been broken by the love of God can minister to those whose lives are broken upon life's wheel. Hence it is that He weakens our strength, compelling us away from our ordinary toils to listen to His voice in quietness, and to acquire, in communion with Him, qualities by which alone we can fruitfully serve others. How entirely it would take resentment out of our spirits if we always remembered that life is vicarious and that we neither live—nor suffer—unto ourselves.

He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.

IT is because God knows us so intimately that we may trust the mercifulness of His judgments so implicitly. He does not expect more from us than He knows us able to render. With accurate knowledge of our limitations He scans all our work, making every allowance for its imperfection and estimating at its full value everything which expresses self-conquest and loyal obedience. He is a faithful Creator to Whom we may at all times commit even those actions of life about which we are ourselves most uncertain, persuaded that He is our kindest Critic and justest Judge. How satisfying to turn from the strictures of men, with their limited knowledge of us, to Him Who "knoweth our frame," and in Whom is no darkness at all!

This is the explanation of the varying burdens and responsibilities which He commits to His people. He has fashioned us each for a special place in the economy of His Kingdom, and the duty assigned to us is exactly proportioned to capacity. Let none therefore say it is impossible to carry out His apprehended Will. Let none seek to evade the obligations of his God-ordered circumstances. Let none endeavour to elude that part of the service of the Gospel which falls to his share. For to do so is to deny this fundamental doctrine of God's knowledge and care. And in doing this we inevitably miss the most precious lessons and experiences of His grace. For, knowing our frame as He does, He draws near with special ministry of strength to him who is weakest.

My meditation of Him shall be sweet.

THERE are times when we have little opportunity of converse with men. The pathway of duty sometimes leads us into solitude, which is always the strongest test of any man's quality. Character, it has been said, is what a man is when he is alone. And this, indeed, is true. For it is when cut off from every external influence and fellowship, and set free from the tension which life amongst others imposes, that what a man really is declares itself. When his thoughts are let go they instinctively seek their native country. Hence it is that the lonely man may actually be in Heaven, or hell, according as his thoughts are alternately centred. Many an one has come forth from the desert, strengthened for toil by his secret meditations there. Many an one, too, has returned more completely under the power of evil than ever.

How important then that in our secret life we should order our thoughts aright! And of this the heart's strongest affection is the key. Where love is, there is no difficulty in meditation. For thought flies unbidden to the loved one. And these are reactive one upon the other. For while the heart controls the direction of the thoughts, it is the thoughts which feed the affections of the heart. Hence where He is loved, reciprocally and gratefully, it is perfectly natural to meditate upon His glory, His goodness, and His grace. All such meditation is not only sweet and satisfying, but transforming and strengthening also.

The word of the Lord tried him.

THUS is explained what at the time must have been insoluble to Joseph in the prison-house of Egypt. Wrongfully accused and cruelly treated, he might well have despaired of the moral government of things. Injustice seemed to be triumphant and virtue to be persecuted. Looking at the human causes of it all, he might have concluded that the wrath of man had nothing whatever in common with the Will of God. But he did not. In spite of every apparent contradiction he held on to the belief that God was the governing Lord of his life. All unconsciously he was being tempered, as the steel blade is tempered in the fire, that he might be made competent as the saviour of his country and the servant of his Heavenly Master. Behind all that he had to bear was the word of eternal Love.

It is always thus that God's instruments are prepared for His use. In the furnace of affliction, and the desert of exile, they are trained to triumphant faith—to the faith which is not daunted by all that appears to conflict with its aims. It is under the pressure of an environment from which there is no escape that there is developed in them those qualities of character which render them dependable when God's time is fulfilled. They learn to rule their own spirits by having to submit to human injustice, and acquire sympathy with those who are down-trodden by themselves being trampled upon. But back of it all is the permissive word of the Lord. He it is Who tries His servants, using unlikely and unkindly instruments for this purpose. But only that they may, one day, share the joy and glory of His service.

They waited not for His counsel.

IMPETUOSITY is always a sign and a source of weakness. It is here pointed out as one of the causes of Israel's many moral failures. Again and again they acted upon impulse, usually the impulse of self-preservation; and in so doing missed the way. God had promised unerring guidance, and did not fail to make the direction of His Will perfectly plain to them when they waited for His word. Their failure to do so merely voiced their failure of faith. They could not wait for Him because they did not altogether believe that He would surely come to their counsel and aid. Hence the history of wrong steps and regretful consequences which stands out as warning to us against impatience in our dealings with the Covenant-keeping Lord.

How self-restrained and unhurried was the Lord Jesus! Again and again, when challenged to avail Himself of His Heavenly resources, He trampled upon the suggestion with "Mine hour is not yet come." He was not afraid to await the Father's time, knowing that eternal Love is never too late in its decision and intervention. Precipitate action on His part, or that of His followers if permitted by Him, could only have embarrassed the Divine scheme of redemption. Surely it is His patience, almost more than any other quality of His life, which sets Him forth as the Saviour of men. And He has bidden us follow His steps. Let us then not fall into Israel's sin by failing to take time both to know the counsel of God concerning ourselves and our service, and to acquire the strength sufficient for obedience.

He led them forth by the right way.

THUS is set to music the story of the great pilgrimage. There is much to record, of varied character, in the experience of the people who journeyed through the Wilderness. The story is one of many ups and downs, of prosperity and adversity, of victory and defeat, of fulness and hunger, of trust and unbelief. The outstanding fact of all, however, is that of God's unchanging faithfulness. By day and night the sacred symbols of His presence abode with them and led them safely toward the land of their hopes. It was not the direct road, nor by any means the shortest, along which they were taken. It was not the easiest, nor the most pleasant. Forty years were spent in making a journey which might easily have been accomplished in ten days. Practically all who set out perished ere the goal was reached. And yet, looking back over all that the journey meant to national life and character, the Psalmist is able to exult in the fact that God's way was the right one. None other could have brought to His people either the lessons or the abiding influences of those weary years.

Israel's story—and God's story—is constantly repeating itself in our lives. In our eagerness to realize our expectations we would take many a short cut which could only lead to disaster, were it not for the restraint of the Divine hand. How glad we should be that He loves us too much to leave us to our own devices ! He aims at making us holy, and hence His discipline of delay and distance. And this is the right and only way,—as one day we shall see and sing.

☉ God, my heart is fixed.

IT is when the heart is anchored firm to the rock of God's faithfulness that we live in the spirit of constant praise. Not that life is without its mysteries, or faith without its trials. Indeed, these latter become more perplexing to most of us as life goes on. The calm confidence, however, that God is utterly trustworthy, and His Word "settled for ever in Heaven," banishes all fear and rebukes all unbelief. Content to wait for the final interpretation of all that is now obscure "until the day dawns and the shadows flee away," the fixed heart can sing its song of rejoicing. For God Who cannot lie hath spoken good concerning us, and hath sealed His Covenant in the precious Blood of His dear Son. The house built upon such a rock cannot be overthrown by any storm.

In the last analysis faith of this order is a deliberate attitude of the will. It is the whole energy of the soul applied to the resolute purpose of cleaving to Him, of believing His Word apart from every contradiction, and of loyalty to His Will in whatever degree it has been apprehended. Let it not be thought that the fixed heart sustains its unaltered anchorage without conflict. The gales of temptation and opposition constantly test it. The one who would so live must prepare himself for strenuous resistance against much that would move him from his sure trust. But as he resists he finds himself miraculously reinforced by the might of God in Whom is his faith. Life may not become easier, but its fundamental confidence becomes firmer for every test it endures.

Hold not Thy peace, O God of my praise.

THE ultimate security of the believer in the attacks of his enemies is the presence of God. Unaided he must fall before them, for they are too many and too strong for him. It is, however, the glory of the life to which he is called, that at such times he does not stand alone. He that is with him is greater far than all that oppose. The Psalmist may feel vindictive toward the men who have done him harm, and may seek their utter destruction at the hand of God. For, be it remembered, he lived under a far less complete illumination than the light that is shed upon us in Christ. At the same time he recognizes that he cannot himself execute the judgment he desires for them. If they are to be punished, and his deliverance effected, it can only be at the hand of the Lord. Hence the strongest plea he can urge is that God should Himself speak. Despite all that follows of merely human recrimination, we may safely infer his willingness to abide by what the Lord shall say and to be satisfied with what He shall do. In this respect, at least, we may in such circumstances take His prayer upon our lips also.

There come to us all times when we realize the futility of trying to beat back our foes. Their enmity may be senseless and their opposition utterly without reason; but we can neither arrest them by argument nor silence them by force. As the servants of the Lord we must not strive—except in cases where His honour is involved and the interests of His Kingdom menaced. Even then we are always at fault if we take the matter into our own hands without reference to Him. We are always safe, however, when we commit our defence to His strong arm.

PSALM CX. 7.

He shall drink of the brook in the way.

THE whole psalm is prophetic of the glory of the Lord Christ. He it is Who is exalted as a Prince and anointed as a Priest for ever. He it is Who is to engage in conflict with many foes and to tread them under; and He it is Who, in the fulness of time, should come, a Man of weakness and weariness, Whose life of conflict and service is only maintained by His unbroken communion with Heaven. He it was Who first of all drank of the brook in the way, and Who, by His own sacrifice, opened the way to that stream for all His followers. They, too, can only live as they find refreshment and renewal by its banks. Life is too strong for them, and its burdens too heavy apart from reinforcements of the Divine life. The stream which flows from out the Throne of God and the Lamb is as necessary to them as it was to Him.

How good it is to know that the brook is in "the way," that it flows close to the dustiest pathway and through the most monotonous and arid desert in which any of us is called to journey. We sometimes imagine that if we could only get away from our environment to some sequestered place uninvaded by the sound of earth's toil we should find it easy to walk in fellowship with our unseen Lord. And, in our weariness, He does on occasions lovingly call us to come apart and rest awhile with Him. But for ordinary days the brook flows at hand. We need not faint, because its waters are always within reach. Every day may be a holy day, as every believer may be a saint, if the musical invitation of the running brook does not fall on heedless ears.

A good understanding have all they that do His commandments.

THE spiritual mind grows not so much by study and meditation as by obedience. It is not our appreciation of the perfection of His law, or the justice of His commandments, or the power of His works, which really develops in us the understanding heart. It is as we walk in obedience to His Will, with such light as we have, that life enlarges and that all our spiritual faculties of perception and action grow. It is thus that in His Kingdom children and untutored men become great. As they follow Him they find the true light. As they make His commandments the working law of life they find them exceeding broad and not grievous. As they seriously give themselves to walk by this rule they come to know Him as is otherwise impossible. For it is in this pathway that He walks with them and speaks peace to their inmost heart.

How foolish is the world's search after a good understanding which excludes the governing condition of all true wisdom. Men give themselves to laborious search into the secrets of nature, and others to the ways of men, for their own profit. And each is doomed to disappointment; for each is only at the circumference of things. Only he who postulates God, and seeks to harmonize life with His requirements, is at the heart of all knowledge. For we are not composed merely of body and mind. The whole man is infinitely greater, and cannot really grow apart from his spiritual nature. Understanding has far more to do with the heart than the intellect. No man by searching can find out God; yet the weakest of us by walking in His ways may know Him, and love Him, and serve Him.

We shall not be afraid of evil tidings.

MUCH debilitating fear is simple dread of the unknown. It is not certainty that makes men cowards, but rather uncertainty. Many of us are prone to imagine all manner of evil as likely to come upon us, and to invest the future with possible danger whose very thought takes all joy out of the present. It is not without meaning that the New Testament speaks of those who all their lifetime are subject to bondage through fear; for it is by no means an uncommon state. The Gospel, which can save men from undue apprehension of the future by investing that same future with the glory of a great hope, lifts them at the same time into a new spirit of certainty and courage. The fixed heart is the secret of the fearless mind.

The dawn of each new day is for us all the threshold of the unknown. We go out to duties and conflicts, which, while they may be strangely like those of earlier days, may also be strangely unlike anything we have ever before experienced. In a moment, without warning, we may come face to face with the greatest test, the greatest sorrow, or the greatest joy of life. And only he can meet these worthily who is girt around by the knowledge of God's faithfulness. This preparation however must be effected in ordinary days, by constant application to His Word and cultivation of His fellowship by obedience. Then nothing can take us unawares nor find us unready. We can meet all that comes when we have the certainty that it comes from Him.

Who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth.

THE distance between Heaven and earth is defiant of all moral measurement. Nothing could be in greater contrast than God's nature and our character, His holiness and our unworthiness, His honour and our shame. Yet it is part of the majesty of His grace that He stoops to concern Himself with us. All the history of His dealings with men is a sermon upon this text. Every intimation of His doings is a story of condescension. And all find their crown and climax in the greatest humiliation of all, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. For thus did He leave the throne of highest Heaven for that of the humblest heart. And, ever since, He has stooped to dwell with contrite men, and to be the Friend of sinners.

The remoteness of God rightly inspires our fear. We think of Him, as indeed He is, the Lawgiver and Judge, and we tremble at the consciousness of our offence against His righteous requirement. The fact of His nearness, however, far outweighs all the terror which His exalted glory inspires. It is not God in the far-off Heaven Who captures our heart's devotion, and inspires us to the consecration of life's service. It is rather God Who, in Christ, stands at the closed door of our hearts knocking and seeking admission; and Who, when hearkened to, comes in to take up His abode within us. His condescending love makes us His adoring sons and servants.

The presence of the God of Jacob.

IF God is best known to us in His varied dealings with men, nothing in the whole of the record is so full of heartening inspiration as the story of His grace toward Jacob. Self-exiled from his home, a fugitive from the presence of his offended brother, an exile through weary years in a strange land, yet God never forsook him nor annulled His Covenant with him. The vision of the ladder set up to Heaven, with its ascending and descending angels, had opened his eyes to the possibility of intercourse with Him against Whose moral law he had offended. And in all his wanderings and vicissitudes he found its promise a reality. For God visited him, schooling him to patience, and teaching him many hard lessons before ultimately restoring him to his own land and fulfilling to him those promises of early days. Chiefest of all did He declare Himself as his God in the memorable incident of Peniel, when the headstrong and self-sufficient man was broken down before Him, until he could only cling to his Conqueror, Who in that hour transformed him from Jacob the supplanter into Israel the Prince.

This God is our God. He can do with us as He did with Jacob, and can yet make our lives to be each one a link in the chain of His purpose for the blessing of the world. Here is the great glory of the Evangel—that the miracle of transformation is effected in all who submit life to His power. For none of us is beyond the scope of His grace, except at our own resolve and will.

Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?

TO the world seeing is believing. In nothing is this seen more clearly than in regard to God and His work. Men expect evidences of His power in the lives of those who avow His rule, and in the cause to which they devote their service. One beneficial result of the modern spirit, which judges everything by results, is that it lays upon God's people the obligation of so ordering their lives before Him as to secure the fullest measure of His strength in the carrying out of their pledge. For let us not forget that He does assert Himself unmistakably in the lives and through the service of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him. If we are straitened it is in ourselves. If our work has not the attesting seal of His blessing the reason is to be sought within our own hearts. If men are not able to identify us with what they already know of His character, the responsibility is ours alone. With such a God, and such great and precious Promises, it should never be possible for the world to doubt His reality by reason of our doings.

The danger of taking the Christian life too lightly is ever with us. We are all prone to forget that "no man liveth unto himself," and, in consequence, to excuse moral carelessness on the ground that it does not much matter to any one but ourselves. If, however, by any shortcoming of ours faith is made difficult for those who are watching us, how great is the blame which must one day be brought home to us! Christ spoke of a stumbling-block and a millstone in the same breath.

What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?

GRATITUDE is instinctive to the new life. No man can receive the Unspeakable Gift of God without having a desire to make practical thank-offering. The one who realizes himself redeemed cannot hold back any part of life from the Lord's possession. Henceforth his supreme purpose is to repay the priceless benefit by consecration utter and entire. That He should condescend to accept the poor gifts we thus offer is an amazing part of His love. That He deigns to use the life put at His disposal, and the while to guard it from evil, overwhelms us with a sense of the glory of His grace. For, indeed, He stoops low when He receives so little.

Yet it is not only by giving ourselves up to His service, in honest endeavour to walk before Him in holiness and righteousness, that we best repay His love. It is rather by taking yet further gifts at His hand, and by drinking yet more deeply of the cup of His salvation. We worship Him most truly when we implicitly obey His word, and actually live on His Fatherly bounty. It is by trusting far more than by giving that we magnify the grace that has saved us. For it is His gifts, and not merely our purposes and energy, which translate themselves into effective witness and service in our lives. Let us, therefore, not fail to drink fresh draughts from His chalice every day. This alone is the secret of the life which exalts His Name. We honour Him most when we trust Him to do yet greater things for us. And these are all in the Covenant.

The truth of the Lord endureth for ever.

THE unchangeableness of His word is ground for universal praise. In a burst of exultation the Psalmist can call upon all nations to glorify His Name because of the wideness of His mercy, and the certainty of His truth. He is no tribal nor national God, restricting His favours to any chosen folk, but the God of the whole earth. His Covenant is no narrow exclusion, but broad as His creative power. All men may come to Him, because all have been redeemed. All nations may praise Him, for His heart is toward all. His truth, translatable into the language of every people, outlives their failings and fluctuations of faith. It is at once the eternal standard of judgment and the perfect expression of mercy. It reaches out beyond the furthestmost needs of the whole race, stretching as far forward into eternity as it reaches backward into history. For His truth is just the expression of Himself.

In a world of changing things, of fleeting friendships and unstable possessions, how deep is the satisfaction that comes from union with that which endures ! There are times when each one of us turns from the passing with dissatisfied heart, and cries out for the permanent upon which to build our eternal hopes and to which to anchor our wayward wills. And it is to no mere abstraction that we turn in our need, but to a Living Person. For He Who once came, and still abides with His people, is Himself the Truth which endureth—"the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

PSALM cxviii. 24.

This is the day which the Lord hath made.

EVERY day is holy to him who realizes the Lord's ordering of life. We do well, indeed, to set apart one day in the week for the special engagements of worship and service. Alas, that the day which should be His has now become so largely man's day of selfishness and pleasure ! But the setting apart of the first day of the week is merely a token that all belong to Him, and expresses the purpose of the devout believer to spend every day in the doing of His Will. How different life would be if we said softly to ourselves as each morning dawns : " This is the day which the Lord hath made ! " How changed would seem its duties and privileges, its opportunities and gifts, its possibilities and demands ! Home and business, work and pleasure, would all be bright with the glow of His presence. Nothing would appear monotonous nor dull, and nothing irksome, if we realized that each day is His. Nor would the heaviest burden be other than light, since His days bring unfailing promise of His strength.

Above all, the satisfying consciousness of every day as the Lord's day, cannot fail to save us from carelessness as to the details of our own conduct and its effect upon others. We shall live under His eye, desiring above all things to secure His approval, and subordinating every interest to the securing of His honour, if we learn to take each day fresh from His hand. And each evening shall find us " a day's march nearer Home " indeed ; a Sabbath day's journey in which, as on the Emmaus road, the Lord Himself has drawn near to go with us.

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